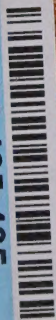


A JEWEL  
OF THE SEAS  
ROBERT LEIGHTON

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THE MAST SWAYED AND FELL OVER

# A JEWEL OF THE SEAS

By  
ROBERT LEIGHTON

Author of  
"Peter Cray," "The Golden Galleon," etc

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# A Jewel of the Seas

## CHAPTER I

### RUTH AYLMER'S WRECK

PERROTINE was not old enough to remember the wild September storm in which it happened ; but during the whole of her quiet, uneventful childhood the grim, black timbers of the wrecked frigate were a familiar object to her, seen every morning when she rose and looked forth from the mullioned window of her little bedchamber high up in the east tower of Mont Orgueil Castle ; and as the seasons went by, with every winter gale, the stranded vessel's fabric had been broken more and more. First, the entire length of her, from wave-washed figurehead aft to the great stern lantern, had been visible. Then her splintered mizzen-mast, with its webbed rigging and spacious fighting-top, had fallen, carrying with it a part of the gorgeously gilded poop, and leaving a heavy gun exposed. For a whole summer that gun had been a favourite resting-place for the brooding cormorants ; but in time the gun also disappeared, and the hungry waves had continued to tear at the outer planks until now, when Perrotine was eighteen years of age, nothing remained of the once gallant

ship but a shapeless skeleton, with a row of gaunt ribs showing black amid the snowy breakers when the tide was low.

The *Rainbow* had been one of the royal ships, built at Deptford, in the year of grace 1627, for the navy of King Charles the First ; but Perrotine ignored this historical circumstance and called it simply Ruth Aylmer's Wreck, because of the little fair-haired child who had been cast up by the sea to be found among the jetsam on the beach and carried home by Andros Aylmer to his farm at Beau Desert.

No one could explain how it happened that that little child had been among the doomed ship's company. Perrotine always yearned to know whether Ruth's mother also had been on board when the stout vessel had been dashed upon the pitiless rocks. But others were less curious, and as Ruth grew into beautiful girlhood they ceased to think of her as a nameless foundling.

Once, on a still, summer afternoon when the island was bathed in sunshine and the tremulous air was heavy with the scent of lilies and roses and sweet mignonette, Perrotine went down to the strand below the castle walls to gather sea shells. Her wandering footsteps took her over the rocks into Little Portelet Cove and to the landing-place of rough-hewn stones, where the row-boats used by the garrison were moored. One of the smaller boats was afloat in the clear green tide that lispd upon the shingle, and as she drew near to it she paused at the sight of a bare white foot resting across the gunwale, and a mass of loose, fair hair which fell like a cascade of gold over the boat's farther side.

She went closer, treading silently ; then stood with her dark, wondering eyes fixed upon the figure of a girl who lay asleep across one of the thwarts, with

her face half hidden by her two hands clasped over her eyes to shield them from the glaring sunlight. Her loose gown of coarse blue homespun had no trimming save a long spray of honeysuckle and wild roses entwined about her waist, but despite the homeliness of her garments she looked like some rare and beautiful nymph come out from the sea to enjoy the light and warmth of the scented air.

Perrotine now understood, as never before, why people spoke of Ruth Aylmer's beauty ; for surely there could be nothing more lovely than the fairness of her long silky hair, the smooth clearness of her sun-browned skin, or the natural grace of her girlish form. There was a refinement in her delicately-shaped nose, in her rounded chin and dimpled cheek and full red lips, such as might have been looked for in the features of one highly born rather than in the face of a humble girl who did lowly work among the cattle and poultry on a Jersey farm.

Perrotine herself was highly born, but she could not boast such surpassing fairness. Her hair was very black, and she thought it coarse, and even though she carefully shielded herself from the burning sun, her complexion was many degrees darker than that of Ruth Aylmer ; while her mouth was large, her nose was not straight, and her cheeks were hardly plump enough to possess playful dimples. She was taller than Ruth, she knew ; but all the rich grandeur of her russet velvet frock, her deep collar of French lace and her dainty shoes, with their high red heels and silver buckles, could not give to her figure the distinction which was natural to the girl who now lay in the boat, unconscious that she was being so closely observed.

As Perrotine moved, a fold of her skirt caught upon one of the oars projecting from the boat's bow, and the



oar, balanced for a moment, slipped over the side, the blade splashing a drop of salt water upon the sleeper's bare foot. Ruth Aylmer awoke with a start, and the boat swayed perilously as she stood up to leap ashore.

"I did not mean to waken you," Perrotine assured her in apology.

Ruth's deep blue eyes regarded her guiltily from under their long, dark lashes.

"'Twas wrong of me to trespass in your boat," she faltered timidly, as she stepped lightly upon the landing-place. "I only thought to rest there for a little while and fancy that I was far out upon the sea, voyaging to some unknown land."

"You have done no harm," Perrotine smiled. "You might even have taken the boat from its moorings and round to St. Aubyn's Bay, had you so wished ; and I should only have been pleased."

The roses in Ruth's cheeks deepened.

"Even had I dared, I have no skill to handle the oars," she regretted, "though indeed it would be like a dream to be floating on such smooth water as there is to-day."

Perrotine stooped and loosened the painter from its ring bolt.

"If you will be seated in the stern, I myself will take you for a sail," she said in invitation.

Ruth drew back a step, not believing at first that the offer was genuine. Perrotine was the daughter of the great Sir Philip de Carteret, King Charles' Lieutenant-Governor of Jersey. She lived like a protected princess in Mont Orgueil Castle, and it was not credible that she should be serious in asking a poor, barefooted farm girl to accompany her in the boat, as though they were friends and equals.

"You shall see that I can manage the oars," Perrotine urged, signing to her to re-enter the boat.

Ruth shyly obeyed, and Perrotine, following her, pushed off with one of the oars and sat facing her as she began to row slowly out of the quiet cove and round the promontory into Grouville Bay. Very skilfully she handled the heavy oars, pulling with a firm strength that presently sent the little craft swiftly over the glassy surface with a murmuring ripple along the planks. And all the while, as she swayed forward and backward at her work, her dark eyes rested admiringly upon her companion's delighted face.

"At such speed it would take only a little while for us to voyage over there to the shores of Normandy," said Ruth, glancing across the blue plain of the sea to the purple line of land where the spires of Coutances Cathedral could be dimly seen against the eastern sky. Then she looked anxiously backward to the castle rock, as if to assure herself that it had not already disappeared in the distance. "Never before have I been so far away from Jersey," she added, drawing a deep breath.

"And yet you are not Jersey born," Perrotine reminded her. "You came from across the sea."

Ruth's fingers picked at a rose leaf that had fallen from her garland.

"Yes," she nodded, "but that was so long ago—twelve years at the least—when I was only five or six. And I remember nothing of my coming but what they have told me at Beau Desert."

Perrotine lifted her oars, and the dripping blades left a double trail of circles on the smooth water.

"It must have been abreast of where we now are

that the waves brought you to shore on that night of tempest," she reflected, "for we are midway betwixt the wreck and the Guillemots Reef, and the storm, you know, was from the north-east. Yonder, too, is the Pixie's Cavern, where the two ship-broken mariners were found when the tide went down."

Ruth dropped the pink rose leaf over the side, and watched it drifting slowly away.

"It appears, Ma'm'selle, that you know the whole story," she said presently, looking up. "Perhaps you can tell me how it came that I, a little helpless child, chanced to be on board his Majesty's ship?"

Perrotine shook her head and again dipped her oars.

"No," she returned; "how should I know? But the captains of ships of war often carry with them their wives and children. Did not I myself sail to Dartmouth in my brother George's frigate when they put me to school in England? My mother has more than once declared in my hearing her belief that the ship's commander was your father."

"And yet," objected Ruth, "Ambrose Vine, who was one of the men who swam to land, protested that he knew not of any child being on board the *Rainbow*. And since he was the admiral's own cabin servant, 'tis hard to believe that he was ignorant of my being in the ship."

"Ambrose Vine was hurt in his head," returned Perrotine, "and his word was of little use in clearing the mystery. All that we know, or maybe shall ever know, is that you were cast up by the sea on the night that the frigate was wrecked. So it's certain that you were not Jersey born."



Ruth turned to gaze down into the green depths of the sunlit water, which was so clear that she could see the stones and shells lying far beneath among the swaying weeds, where the startled fishes flashed their silvery sides and the many-coloured anemones and sea urchins were like flowers in a dream garden. Very soon, Perrotine brought the boat into the midst of the wreck, where the frigate's stout oaken ribs, encrusted with limpets and overgrown with a tangle of umber weeds projected high above the lapping tide.

The two girls leaned over the boat's side, and far down they could discern the remains of the ship's great poop lantern and some of the carven timbers of her counter that still retained faint, glistening traces of richly gilded devices. In one place, they could make out the shape of a ponderous brass cannon, lying apart from its broken carriage, which was black with mussels; in another, amid rusty chains and imprisoned spars, Perrotine declared that she could see the ship's great bell. But what interested them most was an iron-bound chest, which lay upon its side with the lid burst asunder in the after part of the ship, where the admiral's cabin had been. From under the gaping lid had escaped a stream of golden guineas, which looked as large as crown pieces through the magnifying water.

The two girls leaned side by side over the gunwale, with their faces bent close to the green surface.

"Never before have I seen so much wealth!" murmured Ruth. "Little wonder that Martin Aylmer and the other boys who bathe out here have so often tried to dive for it! But it is too deep, and, for all their trying, they have never recovered so much as a single coin of it. So 'tis left for the

mermaids to play with, if there be truly such folk as mermaids dwelling in the sea."

"Why, to be sure there be," asserted Perrotine with conviction, "and mermen, too. They grow up from all the little boys and girls who are lost from ships, as you would have grown had you not floated ashore to Grouville beach. And, indeed, now that I look at your reflection in the sea's mirror, you would have been a very pretty mermaid."

Ruth had lowered her face until it almost touched the water.

"It was not my own reflection that I was looking at," she explained. "I was trying to discover what the white thing is that is lying in the midst of the gold. Do you see it? 'Tis an open book, all gnawed by the crabs and lobsters!"

"Yes, surely," agreed Perrotine. "Like enough 'tis the captain's log-book, wherein day by day he would set down everything concerning the ship's sailing, and all that happened on board. Could we read what is writ on its pages, we might even find record of how the little girl we were speaking of chanced to be of the ship's company, and where they were taking her."

"It little matters where they were taking me," said Ruth, drawing back. "All that I now wish to know is whether I am truly English and not of some foreign land."

"There is no need to question if you are English," declared her companion, "for your foster-father, Andros Aylmer, who carried you to his home, has said so; knowing it by the token that you understood what was said to you in the English, and could not then speak or comprehend our old Jersey tongue. Of a certainty you are English."

As she spoke a waft of air ruffled the sea, and the

submerged wreckage became indistinct. Perrotine again took her oars in hand and was continuing to paddle outward from the land when Ruth said in a tone of anxiety :

“ I beg you to put me on shore, Ma'm'selle ; for I hear the chimes of Gorey Church, and 'tis time that I take the cows home to the milking.”

This was the first time that Perrotine de Carteret had shown any marked favour to Ruth Aylmer. Later, whenever she chanced to see Ruth following the pretty little Jersey cows homeward from the pastures, or tending her flock of turkeys on Grouville Common, she would go out of her intended path to greet the girl and speak with her, and perhaps receive an offering of wild flowers, or a handful of ripe blackberries. But towards the close of the year Perrotine went to stay with Sir Philip in Elizabeth Castle, and thereafter she was missed from the lanes and uplands, like a flower that has had its season.

It was during her long absence from Mont Orgueil that there came alarming news to Jersey of the progress of the civil war which was going on across the sea in England. Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads were continuing their conquests in the west. The battle of Naseby had been fought, and King Charles defeated, with the loss of half his army. The King himself had fled with his Court to Oxford, and the Prince of Wales had taken refuge in France. These happenings were followed by the slow spread of discontent and rebellion to the Channel Islands—the last fortress of the Royalists. For long the rebel forces were checked in Jersey, but at length they grew strong enough to lay siege to Elizabeth Castle, and Sir Philip de Carteret and his garrison, stoutly loyal to the Crown, were cut off from communication with the outer world ; Lady de Carteret being similarly held in enforced

seclusion in the neighbouring castle of Mont Orgueil. Rough work was then afoot in the sunny isle, and the clash of steel on steel and the menacing rattle of musketry were sounds which mingled with the spring song of the birds and the ceaseless murmur of the encircling sea.



## CHAPTER II

### OF THE MAN WITHOUT EARS

RUTH AYLMER could hear the sea's murmur from afar as she sat with her lace pillow in her lap by the open casement of the living-room at Beau Desert Farm. The sun was setting beyond the blossoming orchard and casting a parting gleam of gold over the nodding blooms of a bed of daffodils ; the mellow song of a thrush came from the darkening tree-tops. But she paid little regard either to the whisper of the waves or to the bird's song, and she was heedless of the glory of the spring flowers. She was listening to the regular beat of a horse's hoofs on the Grouville road. Nearer and nearer the sound came, and at length the rider turned in at the farm gates and approached at an ambling pace up the long avenue.

"'Tis Martin," Ruth said, speaking to the silky spaniel that leapt up expectantly beside her. "He has been in to St. Helier's town to get measured for a new pair of jack-boots. Nay, Bijou, jack-boots are not for little dogs."

Martin Aylmer, having dismounted, strode heedlessly across the daffodils and, before entering the house, spoke to Ruth at the casement.

"The rascally Roundheads have checked us again," he declared, crisping his hands in boyish indignation.

Ruth carefully adjusted the pins and bobbins of her lace work and, covering the pillow, rose to her

feet, leaning with her elbows on the window-ledge, where the fading glow from the western sky shone upon the loose tendrils of her fair hair.

"And what is their newest move, Master Hot-head?" she inquired. "They have not dared to do injury to his Majesty, I hope?"

Martin stood with his shoulder against the trellis, where the budding roses climbed.

"Oh, the King has still a head upon his shoulders," he answered lightly, "and is now with his Court at Oxford. 'Tis here in Jersey that the trouble is. Cromwell's spies have got wind that our boats are coming over from St. Malo to-night with secret stores for the soldiers shut up in Elizabeth Castle, and they have brought a frigate into St. Aubyn's Bay. So close have they anchored her under the walls of the castle, her bristling guns commanding the sally port, that 'tis impossible now for our boats to enter. You may guess what this means when I tell you that Sir Philip's reserve of ammunition is spent, even to the last corn of gunpowder, and that the food is well nigh exhausted, not alone by the soldiers but also by the vermin rats."

Ruth shuddered. "Rats?" she repeated.

"Ay," Martin nodded. "The castle is overrun with them—big as terriers, they are; and they are steadily helping the rebels to starve the garrison into submission."

"Sir Philip de Carteret will never submit," averred Ruth. "Whatever happens, he will keep true to the King."

"Yet for the sake of Mistress Perrotine and the starving cavaliers, he may yield," demurred Martin. "A young maid, brought up in luxury as Perrotine has been, can ill endure such hardship."

"Indeed no," agreed Ruth. "And when I think

that here we have food in plenty and she has none, I feel that I would dare any risks if I could only smuggle some dainties into the castle for her."

“Had the gun-ship not been planted so near,” pursued Martin, “it might even have been possible so to help her. But as it is, no boat can attempt to approach the fortress without being captured, or else sent straightway to the bottom with a shot hole through her planks. 'Tis there that the danger lies in the sloops coming over to-night, not knowing that an enemy is lying in wait to pounce upon them to their destruction.”

Ruth was silent for some moments.

“But why cannot the sloops be warned of their danger?” she questioned. “Sure, they are not wholly helpless!”

Martin shook his head.

“Have I not said that no boat may move into St. Aubyn's Bay—ay, nor any other shore in all Jersey?” he returned with impatience. “On sea and on land alike these agents of Cromwell's are on the alert to fall upon every incautious Royalist who so much as dares to show his face. Why, even just now, as I rode home from St. Helier's, I was twice accosted and closely examined, with a pistol at my ear. Sure, 'tis a marvel that I am here with a whole skin.”

Ruth's fingers plucked idly at a sprig of yellow jasmine that grew near her under the window frame.

“There is at the least one way by which we may try to let the people in the boats understand that a trap is laid for them,” she timidly ventured.

Her foster-brother glanced aside at her.

“And what way might that be?” he inquired, with contemptuous superiority. “And how do you propose to convey a message of warning to boats

far out upon the open sea? Would you write a letter on the wing of a butterfly?"

"Nay, I did not say that it could be done," Ruth answered. "I was only thinking of how Joshua Massey was led astray by the flicker of a candle. Were we to display a signal light from the headland of Mont Orgueil to-night, our friends in the boats might possibly gather its meaning and so land the provisions at another place."

"*Ma fé!*" cried Martin. "But 'tis not so bad, that notion of yours! Are you willing to run the danger of putting it to the test?"

"There is no danger that I would not willingly face for the sake of Perrotine de Carteret," Ruth declared resolutely. "What do you say? Shall we go together? There is the stable lantern, well filled with oil."

Martin Aylmer caught at her wrist.

"Listen!" he whispered, leaning towards her, "The boats are due at the turn of midnight. At eleven of the clock we must be prepared to flash our signals to them from the high rocks above the Pixie's Cave. So soon as may be after my mother has bidden us good-night, you will steal out and meet me by the smoky jennet pear tree. Do you understand?"

"Hush!" Ruth cautioned him. She drew back from the window as the door within the darkening room was opened.

It was a serving woman who entered, carrying a tall brass candlestick in which two lighted candles flamed. Ruth put aside her lace work in one of the wainscot cupboards and presently busied herself in laying the table for supper, placing a bowl of early tulips in the centre. The meal was already served when Martin came in from the stable, where he had been giving his horse a feed and finding a second



lantern. Still begrimed with dust after his ride, he took his customary seat at his mother's left hand, and at once poured himself out a goblet of cider.

"Well, my son," began Madame Aylmer, looking up from the joint of cold boiled beef that she was carving. "Have you brought any news from St. Helier's?"

He raised his goblet to a level with his brown eyes.

"News, mother? No; little chance is there of gathering news when the rascally Roundheads permit none to reach us. And yet," he went on as he took his plate, "with all their cunning and their secret lurkings, they are no greater a barrier than a stone wall that may be climbed. It is whispered in the town that a sloop shortened sail off the Banc des Violets last night and lowered a boat which stole inward unmolested, and secretly landed a passenger at the water-gate of Elizabeth Castle. But that was before the coming of the frigate which is now guarding every approach and watching for Royalists as a cat watches for mice."

"'Tis an eloquent sign indeed that the Puritans have ships at their disposal," remarked Madame Aylmer. "Why, they'll be setting up a great navy next, as well as an army, and having admirals of their own!"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed her son.

"And the passenger you mentioned—what of him?" inquired Ruth. "Did you hear who he was, or whence he came?"

"Nay, I know not who he may be, or what his purpose," Martin answered, breaking his bread, "I only spoke of him in the belief that he may have brought news from England."

"Heaven grant that he is a messenger instructing

Sir Philip that his Majesty is despatching an army to the relief of Elizabeth Castle," Ruth murmured.

Martin paused in his eating.

"If that be so," he said, "I'll warrant that my father will be entrusted with the command. For now that he is a colonel, 'tis surely due to him that he should lead his cavaliers to victory."

Madame Aylmer nervously gripped the arms of her chair.

"Your father doubtless has already important work with the army in England," she said. "And as to the sending of relief to Elizabeth Castle, 'tis like enough that King Charles has heard no word of what is going on with us in the Channel Islands. Sir Philip de Carteret may well be trusted to work his own relief; for you may be sure that he is anxious enough to join her ladyship at Mont Orgueil."

"I wonder that he does not try to escape to her," Ruth interposed. "If a stranger could enter unhindered, 'tis clear that Sir Philip could contrive to get out."

"Sir Philip made such an attempt only a week since," Martin informed her. "He dared to come boldly ashore at low tide, accompanied by a half company of his chosen cavaliers, armed with sword and pistol and well mounted. He attempted to make the journey by the Grouville road. But it seems that some spy betrayed his design, and the rebels assembled in force, with orders from D'Assigny to seize him, dead or alive. Sir Philip succeeded in returning into his stronghold, but with the loss of two of his company."

Late on that same night, Ruth Aylmer stole forth from the old gabled farmstead and into the orchard, whose blossoming fruit trees stood like banks of drifted snow against the clouded sky. She had

concealed her girlish lithe figure beneath an ample cloak and, with its hood drawn over her brows and wearing high boots, she looked more like a man than a maid as she moved through the shadows to the smoky jennet pear tree, where Martin awaited her.

"You are in good time," he said to her, appearing from behind the two lighted lanterns which he had rested among the primroses at the tree's root, "and are wise in wearing a cloak : for the night air may be cold out there by the sea. Have you brought a weapon ? "

"None but this stout oak staff," she intimated, revealing it for his inspection.

He looked at it critically.

"'Twould be of little service in defending you against a gang of armed rebels," he commented. "Yet good as a loaded pistol in the hands of a maid who has never drawn a trigger. But I am hoping that you will have no cause to use it in any event. 'Tis only in the crossing of Grouville Common that we shall have occasion for fear ; and, if we keep from the beaten path and hide our lanterns, no one will see us on so dark a night. Come ! "

They took up their lanterns and, hiding the flickering lights beneath their cloaks, stole through the orchard round by the rear of the farm, and by sheltering hedgerows and deep wooded lanes, until they crossed the highway and came out upon the open, scented gorseland of Grouville Common.

From bush to bush they crept in the silent darkness. Once, as they broke cover from a clump of gorse, Ruth clutched at her companion's arm. She had heard a movement in front of them. It was as though some man, some watchful rebel, lying in hiding, had pressed aside a branch of brambles to look out upon

the suspected wayfarers before he should leap forth to stop them. Martin went forward with stealthy tread, holding his staff ready to strike. As he did so a dark, indistinct form loomed up in advance of him, and he laughed aloud on discovering that it was but an innocent nannygoat, startled from her sleep by his approach.

But a more real danger menaced them as they reached the rising land behind Mont Orgueil; for, looking down into the hollow vale beyond, they saw the flickering glow from the camp fires of a party of insurgents, who had stationed themselves within striking distance of the besieged castle; and against this glow of light one of their sentinels, with a pike over his shoulder and a sword at his side, tramped to and fro, barely a hundred paces from the spot where Martin and Ruth crouched in their alarm to watch him.

Ruth drew her companion back, and together they pursued their way in a new direction, due east toward the sea.

In escaping one danger, however, they found themselves confronted by another. Believing themselves to be safe from observation, they were walking quickly through a dark plantation of dwarf oak trees bordering a narrow, sunken lane, when they were startled by the sound of heavy, shuffling footsteps. Ruth went down upon her hands and knees and, peering through the intervening shrubs, made out the alarming figure of a large man, who was advancing slowly up the lane with a curious rolling gait. As he strode nearer, helped along by his staff, from which hung a lighted lantern, she heard him muttering to himself some complaint of his difficult journey.

"A plague on their country lanes, with their ruts and hollows and darksome hedges," he grumbled



hoarsely. "Give I the open sea and a ship's level deck, for choice ; for thereon a man may keep his feet, and make a fair course, with a clear look-out forrard, without'en fear of haunting spirits that do give him the trembles at every step. Nay, tip us a merry stave, mate ; for 'tis said that ghosts do shun the voice of man when heard in song."

He cleared his throat, and presently broke the night's silence with the halting strains of a forecastle ditty, trolling the measured words in unison with his slow, limping steps. Ruth and Martin clung to each other in apprehension as they listened ; for, despite the stranger's apparent harmlessness, they were not yet sure that he was not some Roundhead spy who was to be feared.

"Of all the lives, I ever say  
 A Pirate's be for I.  
 Hap what hap may, he's allus gay  
 An' drinks an' bungs his eye.  
 For his work he's never loth ;  
 An' a pleasurin' he'll go ;  
 Tho' sartin sure to be popt off.  
 Yo ho, with the rum below."

He quickened his steps as he drew yet nearer, and by the dim yellow light from his swinging lantern Ruth caught a glimpse of a face more brutal and forbidding than any human countenance which she had ever before beheld in her gentle life. She was about to seize her staff and lantern and run off in very terror of him, lest he should come more dangerously near, when Martin put his hand upon her shoulder, pressing her backward into the shielding darkness, and the stranger pursued his way, still chanting his coarse ditty :

## A JEWEL OF THE SEAS

"And when my precious leg was lopt,  
     Just for a bit of fun  
 I picks it up, on t'other hopt,  
     An' rammed it in a gun.  
 'What's that for?' cries out Devon Dick :  
     'What for, my jumpin' beau?'  
 'Why, to give the lubbers one more kick !'  
     Yo ho, with the rum below."

He had passed them now, not suspecting their nearness, and, as he trudged along the more level ground, they still could hear the words that he bawled, in a louder, huskier voice that was like the roaring of the wind in a ship's rigging :

"I 'llows this crazy hull o' mine  
     At sea has had its share ;  
 Marooned three times an' wounded nine  
     An' blowed up in the air.  
 But ere to Execution Bay  
     The winds these bones do blow,  
 I'll drink and fight what's left away.  
     Yo ho, with the rum below."

Not until he had disappeared beyond a bend of the lane did Ruth move. Then, with a deep breath of relief, she exclaimed :

"What a dreadful man ! Think you that he is truly a pirate, and that he has passed through all the adventures and wickednesses that he has enumerated ?"

Martin Aylmer laughed.

"Nay," he assured her, "It does not follow that he is the hero of his own tale. 'Tis unlikely : for although he sang of how he rammed his severed leg into the gun, yet you must have seen that he still owns a man's usual number of limbs."

"Did you notice that he has lost an ear ?" Ruth

asked, uncovering her lantern for an instant to see that it burned aright.

"Ay, surely," Martin nodded, "and not one ear alone, but both; as I noticed earlier in the day, when I passed him in St. Helier's town."

"Oh, then," exclaimed Ruth, "this is not the first time that you have seen him? I had judged that he was a stranger in Jersey."

"Had he not been a stranger, I should have paid less heed to him," pursued Martin. "But 'tis not easy to pass so forbidding a face as his and not be aware of it. The townsfolk shunned him as they'd shun a pestilence, and even the little children fled as they saw him standing by the corner of the Old Prison, with his claw-like fingers gripping a button of Robin Lempriere's jerkin, while he questioned Robin concerning the wreck of the King's ship, the *Rainbow*, long years ago."

Ruth turned to her companion with eager inquiry.

"And what can have been the man's concern with the wrecked *Rainbow*?" she desired to know.

"You know as well as I," returned Martin. "But whatever it be, 'tis no concern of ours. Come, let us to our business while the way is clear."

Ruth followed him, but she could not dismiss her dread of the limping pirate from her mind. Little did she know of how closely this earless, war-worn shipman was associated with her own history!

## CHAPTER III

“ HARO ! HARO ! ”

“ HERE we part company,” announced Martin, glancing eastward over the sea, as he came to a halt within the shadows of the old windmill outside of Gorey village. “ Wait here a while, Ruth, until you hear the clock of Gorey church strike eleven. Then go down to the Guillemot rocks and there keep watch. Show not a gleam of your lantern, mind you, until you are certain sure that it can be seen from the sloops. And when you have given the warning signal—three flashes, thrice repeated—wait by the mouth of the Pixie’s Cave, where, if all go well, I will come to you, having shown a like signal from La Crête Point.”

He lingered for a while, as if reluctant to leave her alone in the darkness.

“ You’re not afraid, eh ? ” he asked, seating himself upon the flat table of a broken mill-stone.

“ Afraid ? ” she repeated. “ Not I. There is nothing to be afraid of, unless indeed that ill-visaged pirate, with his blood-curdling song, should choose to annoy me with his company. But even so, you may be sure I will make shift to escape him.”

“ ’Tis fortunate that the night is so dark,” resumed Martin, after a long spell of silence, during which he had searched in vain for the sight of a sail across the sea,



Ruth was leaning against the wooden rail of the mill stairs, facing him. She glanced upward at the clouded sky.

“In another hour from now,” she said, “there will be light in plenty. Even already, it seems to me, that the sky is less black in the far east, as if the moon were trying to break through the curtain of clouds.”

“The moon?” Martin repeated in a tone of superior wisdom. “But there will be no moon to-night.”

“Have you given her special instructions to hide herself for our convenience, then?” Ruth asked him.

He rose to his feet.

“Who told you that there would be a moon?” he questioned.

“None told me,” she answered him. “But last night, when I awoke at the barking of a dog, the room was so light that I thought the day had come; and when I looked out, the blossoming apple trees were like billows of clotted cream beneath the window. And yet ’twas but the moon shining upon them, and ’twas still a full hour from midnight.”

“Tush!” exclaimed Martin, evidently vexed at her precise knowledge. “Had you told me this before, we might now have been at home in our beds instead of uselessly cooling our heels out here on a wind-swept headland!”

“I had not thought that it was cold,” rejoined Ruth, “and for my own part, I have no wish to be at home in bed, to the neglect of our duty towards our friends starving in Elizabeth Castle. And our presence here has not yet been proved to be useless.”

Her eyes were searching the sea as she spoke, and now she pointed outward.

“Is that a sail that I see, creeping along in the dark?” she wondered.

Martin followed the direction in which her finger pointed.

"You're right in that it is a sail," he decided. "But 'tis the sail of a sea-going ship, bound southward. 'Tis not the sloops. Would that your promised moon would come out from its hiding and let us see more clearly!"

He had taken up his lantern, and now Ruth saw him go round by the back of the mill and heard his retreating footsteps. She watched for him passing over the higher ground on his way to the place where he had chosen to station himself. But so secretly did he go, she neither saw nor heard him, and she began to doubt that he had quitted the neighbourhood of the windmill.

She waited, watching the dark, drifting clouds slowly breaking and revealing here and there a faint gleam which showed that the moon had risen behind them. Presently the far-off line of the horizon became silvery bright, and in the midst of a slanting moon-beam she perceived three separate sails, which appeared as yet to be mere flecks upon the sea. They were the expected sloops from St. Malo; of this she could have no doubt. But it would be long before they could come within signalling distance, for the wind was light and the tide against them.

While she watched, the distant line of silver faded and the boats were hidden. But higher in the sky the clouds were torn apart and the full moon shot forth, sending a path of trembling light across the water, and making the land as clearly visible almost as if it had been day. Outward from the beach, where the murmuring tide broke white upon the rocks, she could see the gaunt skeleton ribs of the *Rainbow*. To her left rose the steep crags that were crowned by

Mont Orgueil Castle, half hidden by intervening trees. She turned, hoping that in the brighter light she might be able to make out the promontory of La Crête Point, where Martin must now be waiting for the approaching boats.

Suddenly she became aware of a shadow moving across the grass at her feet, and she started back alarmed. Her heart thumped against her side, and she felt a cold moisture gather upon her face as she realised that it was the shadow of a man ; but she made no sound, even her breathing did not sensibly quicken. With eyes fixed upon the grass, she sat perfectly still, watching the shadow lengthen. A hoarse, wheezing sound reached her ; she heard a stick striking against a loose stone. From beyond the near corner of the mill, there then appeared the man himself, moving awkwardly, with slow, slouching gait ; and she saw, as she had feared, that it was the earless pirate of the lane. She knew him on the instant by his peculiar walk, by his long sea-coat and loose top boots, and by the knotted red kerchief that he wore about his head in place of a hat. His lantern had burnt itself out, but the moon's light was so clear that Ruth could have counted the buttons on his coat had not his back been turned to her.

He took but a dozen shuffling strides away from her before coming to an abrupt halt. It seemed to her that he was intent upon watching for the provision boats, and she dreaded to think that he designed to do some mischief towards them. She guessed rather than knew that he had come from off the Parliament's frigate now anchored off Elizabeth Castle ; and if this were so, then surely he was an enemy to all Royalists, and therefore to be avoided at all costs. But presently she discovered that his attention was fixed not upon the far stretches of the sea but upon

what remained visible of the wreck, for he began to mutter some incoherent words, which clearly referred to the *Rainbow*, and the manner in which she had come to her doom upon the Grouville rocks. Was he speculating upon how he might secure the golden coins which lay deep down in the ship's ruined cabin? What was the man's purpose in being here at this late hour of the night?

Ruth could make no meaning of what he said, nor did she try to do so. All that she wished was to avoid him; and, indeed, from the moment of seeing him emerge into the moonlight, she had been busy contriving a means by which she might escape unseen.

She rose slowly to her feet. Very silently, very cautiously, inch by inch, she crept along the shadowed wall of the mill, until she came to the embayed doorway of the granery. Here she paused and glanced round, and her natural courage misgave her when she saw that the stranger was now striding quickly towards her place of refuge. In spite of his dragging steps, his limping gait, which seemed to be due to a lameness in one of his knees, he approached with astonishing speed. Ruth pressed herself close against the door, covering her lantern. She could see him coming. He came so close to her that she was conscious of the pungent odour of tar rope that came from his clothing. As he drew abreast of her, he stumbled; his staff, with its pendent lamp, fell with a clatter from his grasp, and, as he stooped to recover it, his groping hand was within an inch of her indrawn feet.

So slow was he in regaining his balance, and moving away, that Ruth was amazed that he did not discover her by the creaking of her leather girdle as she breathed, or by what seemed to her the loud beating of her heart. But he trudged on again and



soon disappeared beyond the farther wall of the grain shed, and in her relief at his going, she almost forgot her caution. Taking her opportunity, she glided out from her hiding-place, stood a moment in hesitation, then sped across the moonlit grass to the cliff's edge and clambered downward, little caring now whether the dreaded pirate heard her or not.

By ways well known to her, she descended the rocky slopes, pausing only now and again to look outward upon the sea whenever the moon's light pierced the drifting clouds. At such times, she would direct her gaze unerringly to the point where the three tiny sloops sailed, drawing ever nearer and more distinct, driven by a light breeze from the south-east which seemed to bring with it sweet perfumes from the orchards of Brittany. But not yet were they near enough for an unexpected signal to be seen from their decks, and Ruth waited patiently, while the whispering tide came in, slowly covering the weed-fringed rocks.

Save for the murmuring of the loose shingle as the ripples drew it downward, all was silent. Once a sea-bird, wheeling high, gave a mournful scream; an owl sent forth its dismal call from among the rank ivy on the castle walls. Once Ruth heard the measured tramp of soldiers' feet and a sentinel's sharp, imperative challenge as the guard was changed. But these occasional sounds served only to make the silence more marked. Presently the rising tide reached the smooth sand, and the shingle ceased its murmuring.

Long and wearily she waited. Slowly the minutes went by ; but at length the jangling chimes of a church clock were followed by the twelve deliberate strokes of midnight. Never before had Ruth Aylmer been abroad alone at so late an hour, and not often had she

felt so cold and desolate as now. She sought the shelter of a cleft between two great boulders, where the nipping wind could not reach her. She drew her cloak close about her and leaned back her head upon a soft cushion of cliff daisies. Soon she became comfortably warm ; but with the warmth her tired eyes grew heavy, and the light of the moon upon them was almost painful. She was tempted to close them, yet the danger of falling into sleep was too great, and she stood up and waited, watching a heavy cloud drifting across the sky.

When at last the cloud obscured the moon and all was dark, she caught up her lantern and, holding it so that its light might be seen from the boats, uncovered it three times, and again twice three times. There was no response. But ere the cloud's ragged edge grew bright, again she flashed her signal as before ; and this time, while she watched, she saw a light upon the sea, repeating her signal. When again the moon shone forth, the three sloops had gone over on a new tack, and were bearing outward, as if to delay their entrance, or else to make for another than their intended harbour.

Satisfied that her warning had been seen and understood, Ruth extinguished her lantern. She had no means of knowing whether or not Martin also had displayed his signal. He had said to her that when he had done so he would come to her at the mouth of the Pixie's Cavern, where she was to wait for him. But as yet there was no sign of his coming, and in the meantime she remained within the shelter of the rocks, lying as before with her head pillowed upon the soft tuft of cliff daisies.

This time she was less anxious to keep awake, and she closed her eyes, even courting a few moments' slumber.

How long she lay thus she did not know ; but when again she opened her eyes it was to see that the moon had travelled perceptibly higher in the now cloudless sky. She sat up with a start and stared wonderingly about her, conscious that it had been some sudden, sharp sound that had awakened her. On the castle battlements high above the soldiers were astir ; she could hear the tramping of many feet. Then from nearer at hand there fell upon her ear the regular swish, swish of dipping oars and the creak of straining rowlocks. This unmistakable sound came from beyond a projecting shoulder of the low headland. The rower's strokes were quick, but laboured. He was evidently in great haste. Ruth could hear the bubbling splash of water at the boat's bow as it met the waves.

She rose to her feet and, leaving her unlighted lantern where it lay, clambered excitedly over the intervening rocks, at the risk of turning an ankle in her reckless haste.

Not far had she gone when she was startled by the sharp crack of a musket shot, which echoed among the chasms and caves. Why she went any farther she could not have told. She might well have turned back and made her way homeward to Beau Desert, leaving Martin to follow ; if, indeed, he had not already gone home in advance of her. But something—perhaps her mere girlish curiosity to know the cause of the gun-shot—impelled her to climb upward to the ridge of the reef and look over into the wide, moonlit expanse of Grouville Bay.

Close inshore, abreast of the rock which was known as the Chapelle des Mauves (because of the gulls that were wont to congregate upon its flat, wave-washed table), she perceived a small cutter, or ship's longboat, her tall, dark sail leaning over from the

breeze and a wash of white foam at her cutwater. Three or more of her crew were crowded together in her bows, and, as Ruth watched, there was a flash from under the foot of the jib. A puff of white powder smoke rose into the air, and again there came the sharp report of a musket. To Ruth it seemed that this second shot had been aimed at the very rock behind which she now crouched, peering between two jagged points of granite ; for the bullet kicked up a spurt of dry sand not a score of yards away from her. Had she been seen ? Was it at herself that the boat-men were firing ?

The echoes of the shot had barely died away when again she was aware of the thumping of oars and the creak of straining rowlocks. She looked downward beyond the point of the reef. Here the sea was dark, but her keenly searching eyes soon made out the shape of a tiny row-boat, moving like a shadow towards the landing-place in Little Portelet Cove. In an instant she understood. The rower, who was pulling as if for dear life, was some adventurous messenger to Mont Orgueil Castle, and he was being pursued by the men in the larger boat, who were attempting now to arrest him, dead or alive, and so frustrate the delivery of his message. If this in truth were the case, then assuredly the fugitive, whoever he might be, was a loyal servant of the King, and as such, must be helped.

Ruth Aylmer had played too often in days gone by among these same rocks and sands not to know her nearest and surest way into Little Portelet Cove, towards which the rower seemed to be making. Every boulder and pool was familiar to her, and she clambered with surprising agility down to the level beach. She kept within the shadows of the cliffs until she came nigh to the entrance of the Pixie's



Cavern, when she made her way from rock to rock down to the water's edge. She was already in advance of the boat, and now, as she stood with her feet and skirts in the tide to get a better view of it, she discovered that it had a second occupant, who lay back in the stern, apparently watching the pursuing cutter.

She wondered why he did not share the work at the oars ; but she reflected that perhaps he was armed with a gun, and was waiting his chance to fire it upon the cutter. His companion at the oars, however, was obviously in no great need of help, for he was rowing most skilfully, albeit he appeared to be somewhat exhausted with his hard work. Would he be able to hold out until his goal was reached ? The castle sally-port was still a good two hundred yards away, and while the tide was not yet at the full flood there were many dangerous shoals that invited disaster to anyone unfamiliar with their positions. Furthermore, there was the peril of his being crippled by a well-aimed shot.

Ruth watched the exciting chase with bated breath, fretting in that she was unable to give help. Already the cutter's mainsail could be seen above the outlying rocks which hid her hull. There was a chance that under the lee of the reef the lessened wind would check her progress ; but the rower's exhaustion was becoming with every moment more apparent.

Realising how small was their hope of escape, Ruth was minded to call aloud to the hard-pressed fugitives, bidding them pull in to the open beach while yet there was time ; and she was about to obey her impulse when, watching the small boat, she saw the rower arrest his right oar, and dexterously turn the boat's bow shoreward, pulling desperately for this nearer, more immediate refuge.

It was at this moment that Ruth heard a low

whistle from somewhere behind her. She knew it to be a call from Martin Aylmer, and, glancing backward in search of him along the line of the cliff, she raised her hand to her cheek and gave an answer, calling aloud the old Norman appeal for help, still used in the Channel Islands :

*"Haro ! Haro !"*

Her voice was so silver clear and penetrating, it might have been heard a mile away, and no Jersey man or woman would fail to know the meaning of her cry.

The small boat was heading straight towards her and she advanced to meet it, now wading knee deep in the pools, now crawling amid the tangled seaweed, clutching at the slippery rocks to preserve herself from falling. The rower seemed to be well aware that in the present state of the tide it would be possible for him to make a landing in the shallows alongside this nearer reef, while a heavier craft than his own could not follow. A dozen strong strokes would bring him into a narrow inlet where the tide now lapped against the dark rocks at Ruth Aylmer's feet.

But already the pursuing cutter had rounded the point.

"Ah, they ha' doubled !" cried an excited voice from her forward deck. "Hard a-starboard, Samuel ! Over with her ! Let them not escape ! Now, Coppinger ! Now ! Give 'em another shot ere they leap aland under they dark cliffs !"

Almost immediately there was a flash of fire, a sharp crack : and a bullet sent a white splinter flying from the boat's larboard gunwale.

The rower gave three vigorous strokes, which brought him into the shielding darkness of the deep shadows cast by the higher rocks. Then he shipped

his oars, and the tiny craft, carried on the top of an incoming wave, crunched against the ledge upon which Ruth knelt, as yet unseen, in the slimy wrack.

She was bending far over, with hands outstretched to catch at the boat.

“Quick, sirs, quick !” she panted. “Jump ashore !”

The two fugitives lost not a moment. Heedless of a wetting, they scrambled out of the boat and waded ashore. Ruth followed them and overtook them as they reached a stretch of moonlit sand beyond the rocks that were now between them and the sea.

She caught at the wrist of one of them—the one who had been at the oars. The wrist was so slender that her fingers met around it and she marvelled that the oars had been pulled so strongly. Already she had seen that he was but a beardless youth.

“Who are you ?” she demanded. “Where go you ?”

The youth struggled to free himself, believing, no doubt, that he had fallen into the hands of some enemy.

“Let us pass !” he cried in a tremulous voice that was more like a timid woman’s than a boy’s. “Let us pass, I say !”

With a swift movement, he snatched away his hand and as swiftly drew a long dagger from beneath the folds of his dripping cloak. Ruth seized the arm that was lifted to strike her, but was herself seized from behind and flung back. There was the click of a sword’s point on the pebbles as she turned and confronted her second assailant. He had raised his drawn weapon, and stood with it shortened for a thrust ; but at sight of her beautiful face in the

moonlight, he instantly lowered it and started back a step, staring at her in confused wonderment.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he faltered in a clear, boyish voice as he lifted his cavalier hat in salute, "but upon my honour, I mistook you for a man."

His face was indistinct in the shadows, but his figure, like his voice, was that of a boy. Ruth was conscious that although he stood upon higher ground, he was hardly a span's measure taller than herself. His cloak was fastened at the neck with a sparkling jewel, and, as he raised his arm, its front folds were turned aside and she caught the glint of a breast-plate of burnished steel. It was clear to her that he was a person of quality. She was certain that she had never seen him before. Vaguely she wondered who he might be, and for a fleeting instant she thought of the passenger who, as Martin had told her, had been secretly landed from the sloop.

From him, she turned to his companion, who had gone on a few paces up the beach and now stood in the moonlight, imperatively beckoning. A little cry of astonishment escaped Ruth Aylmer's lips as she gazed upon him. In her struggle with him his hood had slipped back and released a loose coil of long, dark hair, which now half-veiled the white and agitated face of Perrotine de Carteret.

The two girls recognised each other at the same moment.

"Ma'm'selle Perrotine!" Ruth cried in consternation.

"Ruth Aylmer!" exclaimed Perrotine. "How came you here?"

Perrotine de Carteret did not wait for an answer, for the sound of the lowering of the cutter's sail reached her from beyond the intervening boulders, and there was no time to lose. She strode swiftly

up to her lingering companion, and as she caught at his arm to urge him to immediate escape, there came a rattle of musket-shots.

“Quick, Your Royal Highness ! Quick !” she panted.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PIXIE'S CAVERN

*"Quick, Your Royal Highness! Quick!"*

Ruth Aylmer had overheard those urgent words, not meant for her keen hearing. But in her excitement at the immediate danger which menaced the two fugitives, she did not at once comprehend their significance or question what Perrotine de Carteret had meant by addressing her companion as "Your Royal Highness." All that she thought of was the need for instant escape; for it was clear to her that the men in the cutter did not intend yet to abandon the chase. Equally clear was it that Perrotine de Carteret could not hope to gain the refuge of the castle while her pursuers remained near. She must seek some safe hiding-place among the rocks.

There was only one such hiding-place that Ruth could think of, but it seemed to offer all that was needed in the present emergency. It was a cave in the face of the neighbouring cliff; not an inviting retreat, for it was said to be haunted, but certainly secure, for while its inner chamber was spacious, its entrance was so concealed that no stranger was likely to discover it, unless by diligent search in the broad light of day.

"Come! Come, you must hide, or you will surely be caught!" she implored, pulling at Perrotine's cloak. "Come to the Pixie's Cavern!"

Perrotine and her companion followed her. She led them up the sloping beach, splashing through the tidal pools, scrambling over the slippery rocks, keeping always in the shadows and never once pausing in her flight until she came close under the embayed wall of the cliff. Here for a moment she turned to assure herself that they could not be seen from the cutter. She heard the men's voices, and the thumping of their long-sweep oars as they worked her into the shallows, the while they were being fired upon by the soldiers on the castle ramparts. But they were still beyond sight.

Yet other sounds reached her from nearer at hand—the sound of loosened gravel trickling down the incline of the cliff, the falling of a stone dislodged, and the tread of heavy feet as Martin Aylmer hastened downward in response to her call for help.

Perrotine also heard, and took new alarm.

“’Tis my brother, ma’m’selle,” Ruth reassured her. “Have no fear, but go with your friend into the cave. In there you will be safe—at least for a time. Oh, I beseech you to be quick!”

Perrotine de Carteret knew that cave as well as did Ruth, and she needed no guidance.

“Now, sir, your hand, and I will help you in,” she urged. And with her companion she mounted the splintered rocks behind which the cave’s dark entrance was hidden.

Ruth stood aside and, as he passed her, the young stranger glanced at her, hesitating to go in front of her.

“And you?” he said softly. “Come you not also into the cave?”

She shook her head.

“No, sir,” she answered, “I will wait until I know that you are both in safe hiding.”

So narrow was the opening, it was little more than

a cleft in the granite wall, that Perrotine could only enter sideways, bending to adapt herself to its crookedness. Her wet cloak encumbered her movements, and her companion's sword for a moment balked his passage as she drew him inward. But even before Martin Aylmer had descended to the beach, or could have seen them, they had both disappeared into the black darkness.

"'Tis fortunate that we are neither of us giants," said Perrotine as she led the way over the uneven floor ; " but at the least we may be sure that no grown man can squeeze through in pursuit of us."

"Nevertheless," he reminded her, "where a man may not follow, a pistol bullet might still find easy entrance. And if these rascals from the frigate should discover our refuge, how do you propose to escape them? Sure, we shall be entrapped, unless, indeed, the cave is conveniently furnished with a back door. 'Twere wiser far to trust to the open air."

"I beg and implore Your Highness to be silent," urged Perrotine in a trembling voice of fear as she led him to a part of the cave where he could stand upright.

"I beg you to cease addressing me as Highness," he recommended. "'Tis hazardous. Consider what it would mean were the pretty damsel with the golden hair and the sea-blue eyes to discover who I truly am! Why, the news would fly about the island like a very pestilence!"

His reference to Ruth Aylmer's hair and eyes was not lost upon Perrotine. Perhaps she was a little jealous ; but she dared not rebuke him for his recognition of a pretty face other than her own.

"And pray, then, how may I rightly address Your Royal Highness if not as Highness?" she inquired

in her perplexity. "Sure 'twould be no less hazardous to call you Charles, or Prince of Wales."

"Nay, then," he returned lightly, "call me what you will—Tom, Dick or Harry—I care little, so you betray not my ownership of the title that you have just spoken. Yet 'tis necessary, I suppose, that you call me something, since I am to be with you for a time as a guest of Lady de Carteret. What say you to the name of—well, Master Jack Merrythought, or, for short, Jack Merry?"

"Jack Merrythought?" Perrotine repeated the name in a whisper, while feeling with her feet for a level standing-place. "'Twill do for the present. 'Tis at the least appropriate; for I have already discovered that you have in you the makings of a very merry monarch. And am I then so to call you always, as if it were your true name?"

"Why, yes," he decided. "If you like, you may presently introduce me by it to the fair-haired damsel who so narrowly escaped the point of your poniard just now upon the beach. By my faith, Mistress Perrotine, I shall not soon forget the dazzling picture that she presented when she revealed herself in the moonlight! Pray have you many such maidens in your island of Jersey?"

Perrotine pressed a hand upon his arm, again to enjoin his silence. She had heard footsteps, and now, as she nervously turned, she saw a shadow cross the faint strip of reflected light which marked the cave's dark entrance.

Ruth and Martin Aylmer stood outside. Martin had seen something of the chase, and had guessed that the pursuing cutter was from the frigate anchored off Elizabeth Castle. He had seen Ruth helping the two fugitives to escape up the beach, but had not yet discovered who those two fugitives were.

"'Tis Perrotine de Carteret," Ruth told him now, "accompanied by one who is a stranger to me—a well-favoured young cavalier. I know not why they adventured to run such a risk, unless it be that they are carrying some message of importance to her ladyship."

Martin was nursing his right hand, whose knuckles had been badly barked during his hasty descent of the cliff.

"I warrant you 'tis that," he agreed, "a message from England, brought over by him who secretly landed yesternight from the sloop of which I told you. 'Tis King's service, you may be sure; and, therefore, our duty is to give all the help that we may."

"Yet how can we help any further?" Ruth questioned. It was her habit to look to her foster-brother for advice.

"'Tis the reverse of helping them that we should linger here to betray their hiding-place," he decided. "Come, let us also hide in the cave, lest we be seized by these Roundheads."

He was about to enter; but Ruth drew him back.

"No, no!" she protested, agitatedly. "Let us rather make a pretence that it is we who have now come ashore from the boat. These shipmen who are chasing Ma'm'selle Perrotine and her friend can scarce have seen their faces. They will know no difference. And if we are caught, you and I, they will find not a ghost of a letter upon us; nor can they force us to disclose that of which we are ignorant. If we show ourselves for a moment, running away, the men will surely come after us. So shall we allure them from the cave."

"*Je te crais!*" exclaimed Martin. "Why, yes, that is even what I was minded to propose. 'Tis a game worth the trying, in any case."



Already the men had landed from the cutter ; already they were searching along the rocky beach, spreading themselves out like a pack of hounds eager to pick up a line of scent. In her heart Ruth Aylmer prayed that they would not discover the footprints on the moist sand, and learn from the impressions that there had been three pairs of feet instead of the two that they would look for. Well was it, she reflected, that there was no trail of footprints on the hard rocks beside the cave !

“ Come ! Let us go at once,” urged Martin.

But Ruth hesitated. She crept silently back to the mouth of the cavern and spoke as she looked into the darkness.

“ Ma'm'selle Perrotine ! ” she called in a cautious voice that was hardly more loud than a whisper. “ They are coming ! Get to the extremity of the cave. Breathe not a word—make not a sound—until you are sure that the way is clear for your escape. And then—God speed you both ! ”

The youth whom Perrotine had decided to call Jack Merry was standing but a few inches away from her, with his sword unsheathed, ready to defend the passage. Hearing Ruth speak so near to him, he put forth his free hand to draw her within, and she saw the sparkle of a diamond upon one of his fingers. Guessing that his purpose was to protect her from the rough men who even now could be heard tramping about on the loose shingle, she moved back from him and hastened to Martin's side.

One of the men was approaching, swinging a lighted link to and fro, and searching in every cranny of the rocks where there was a possibility of a Royalist hiding himself. Ruth saw that he carried a musket under his arm.

“ This way ! ” urged Martin, taking her hand.

Very silently they went, step by cautious step, until a high shoulder of rock loomed up between them and the nearest of the searchers.

"I'll be zwoon 'twas in thik direction that they fled," the man muttered. "Us should ha' zeen 'em else, up along they cliffs."

By this speech Ruth judged that he was not a Channel Islander, and that therefore he was not likely to be aware of the existence of the Pixie's Cavern. She watched him coming nearer and nearer, listening to his crunching footsteps on the pebbles. The fitful light from his resinous torch flickered upon the rocks, casting long, fantastic shadows. She was trembling now : not with any fear for herself, for she knew that she still might run, with the certainty that no man could overtake her. But he was approaching perilously near to the cave. He seemed even to be searching for an opening in the cliff.

Going down upon her hands and knees, she crept farther towards the extremity of the shielding rock, so that she might follow his every movement, and her heart seemed to cease its beating when she beheld him standing still, with his flaming torch held aloft, looking, as she believed, directly into the narrow crevice of the cave's mouth ! Had he known beforehand that the cave was there ? Had he heard the murmur of voices or some other suspicious sound, which told him that someone was within ?

## CHAPTER V

### RUTH AYLMER'S RUSE

NEARER and nearer the man moved, stepping cautiously foot by foot until the flame of his torch must have sent a long shaft of light far into the recesses of the rocky chamber where Perrotine and her companion were concealed. He could hardly fail to discover them now !

Ruth Aylmer trembled in fearful apprehension as for a moment she saw him bend forward, preparing to enter the cave. In that moment her loyalty and devotion were put to the severest test ; but her resourcefulness was equal to the emergency. Obeying the first impulse which prompted her, she plunged her hand into the shingle upon which she knelt, and let the loose pebbles slip through her fingers noisily.

In an instant the man turned, diverted from the true scent, and made for the rock from behind which the betraying sound had issued. He crept round it, busily searching, holding his link above his head. The flame sent a quivering beam of light along the ground. Martin Aylmer, pressing himself flat against the rock, watched its growing brightness, keeping close within the shadow. Then the flame was flashed full in his face.

"Hi! Here the varmints be!" the seaman shouted aloud, springing forward. "Gideon! Zilas! Bill!—here they be, for sure; the two on 'em. I told 'ee they bedn't vlow'n var away!"

Martin had leapt to his feet like a startled animal, and now, forgetting Ruth in his own alarm, or trusting to her to follow him unbidden, he turned and ran off; but, unhappily, full into the arms of one of the approaching searchers, who seized him and threw him to the ground. There he lay struggling and kicking, with his captor kneeling upon him, while Ruth, thinking only of carrying out her plan of deception, permitted herself to be caught by the man with the musket.

Resting his weapon against the rock, he gripped her by the wrist with his strong right hand.

"So-ho!" he cried, lowering his link so that its light shone steadily upward into her calm face. "Dedn't I tell 'em 'twere a maid at they oars? An' zo it were, for sure. I allows you pulled 'mazing well, Mizzy; though a bit weak on the ztarboard zide. Nay, don't 'ee ztruggle, my pretty," he added, tightening his grip. "Easy! You'm caught, fair an' square."

She had thought even then to break free and, running, to decoy him farther from the vicinity of the cave. But he was too strong for her. He dragged her from the support of the rock against which she had leaned, and then led her across an open stretch of level beach to where Martin still lay upon his back, writhing under the weight of the man who knelt upon his legs.

Three other men were about him. One carried a huge lantern, whose circle of yellow light made the surrounding darkness more intense.

From the midst of that darkness a fifth man

presently appeared, elbowing his way into the little crowd.

Ruth Aylmer noticed as he came into the light that he carried a long rapier, and wore jack boots and a plumed hat. His attire was a strange mingling of the studied simplicity of the Roundheads, and the affected gaiety of the Cavaliers, and it would have been difficult to tell which side had the larger share.

He looked down upon Martin as if the boy had been some new order of animal.

"Who and what is he?" he demanded to know, "a creature of Philip Carteret's, I'll be bound. Nay, stand him upon his feet, that I may see his face. We shall probe no secrets pinning him down thus. You have already vexed him by doing him a needless injury, look you."

He had seen that Martin's hand was bleeding.

"Beggin' your honour's pardon, Master Bowden," said the man who held Ruth in his grip, "but the wound you'm regardin' be the wound of a leaden bullet vrom outen my musket, what time you did order I to vire." He glanced round the flame-lit faces of his shipmates. "Where be Zilas Cruse, as zaid Nick Coppinger couldn't hit a ztack of hay at ten yards?" he asked. "I've winged un, mark you—winged un fair an' square!"

Martin was allowed to rise to his feet, albeit rough hands still held him, lest he should attempt to escape. He looked across at Master Bowden and knew on the instant that he had seen him before; once in St. Peter's Port, and more recently, nay, even a few short hours ago, coming ashore in St. Helier's from the intruding frigate. But not until now did he know that the man was the notorious Captain Bowden, whose reputation for piracy had



made his name a terror to the shipmen of the Narrow Seas.

Bowden directed his crafty, beady eyes upon the boy, the while he hitched his long rapier in front of him, and leaned with his two hands upon its hilt of twisted gold.

"H'm!" he muttered to himself, as though something about the prisoner perplexed him. "'Tis not as I thought. And yet I might well have known that so important a person would never have ventured alone in an open boat with none but a slip of a girl for captain and crew. Was't a mere trick to blind me, I wonder?"

He stood for some moments in silence, staring searchingly into Martin Aylmer's face by the light of Coppinger's torch, and then he spoke aloud, assuming a kindly, almost friendly tone:

"Since you have but now come forth from Elizabeth Castle," he said, "doubtless you can inform me concerning the identity of Sir Philip Carteret's visitor, who was landed secretly from the sloop yesternight?"

To which Martin Aylmer answered with an honesty which threatened to put an end to all Ruth's preconcerted plans:

"I have not come forth from Elizabeth Castle. I have not set eyes upon Sir Philip de Carteret for many a long day; and as to the stranger who was landed from the sloop, I know naught of his identity."

"What?" cried Bowden, "do you dare to tell me a lie like that when with mine own eyes I saw you but an hour ago steal out by the sally-port with this girl who accompanied you? Do you dare to say that it was not you and she whom we pursued, when your hand is at this moment

bleeding from the bullet that we fired upon you ? ”

Ruth Aylmer was in mortal dread lest Martin should still further betray the truth ; and dragging herself forward she boldly confronted Captain Bowden, determined at all hazards to keep Martin from speaking.

“ I'd thank you, sir, to tell me what you mean by chasing and firing your pop guns upon an innocent boat,” she cried vehemently. “ And why you and your men are now molesting my brother and me, who have done you no manner of injury.”

Bowden directed a surprised glance upon her.

“ Innocent ? ” he repeated, drawing back a step. “ By my boots, I'll not deny but you yourself do look the very soul and embodiment of innocence ! Art not afraid to be abroad so late at night ? ”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“ Had I been afraid, I should still be at home in my cot,” she answered him.

He nodded, still keeping his gaze fixed wonderingly upon her fair face.

“ And pray, where may your ladyship's cot be situate ? ” he then asked.

“ In the farmstead of Beau Desert, a mile's walk from here,” was her prompt response. “ And where, with your honour's permission, we will quickly return, so soon as we have hauled up our boat where the tide will not reach it.”

Bowden turned to one of his men.

“ Dost know this farm whereof she speaks, Silas ? ” he questioned.

“ Ay, that do I,” returned Silas. “ 'Tis a nest of mischievous Royalists, where live the brood of Andros Aylmer, now absent in England, fighting

for King Charles against our lord and master General Cromwell, and I'll be sworn that these two chickens of his have been engaged this night in some deed of political mischief, despite their seeming innocence."

Of his two captives Bowden appeared to consider that the girl was the more likely to speak the truth than the boy, for it was to Ruth that he spoke when he said :

" 'Tis idle for you to deny that it was some wrongful business that brought you forth from Elizabeth Castle. I warrant y'are as cunning a pair of conspirators as any in Jersey."

Ruth was breathing more calmly now, conscious that her ruse was proving successful.

" You may warrant yourself whatsoever you please, Master Bowden," she retorted boldly, " and if 'tis wrongful business that we should attempt to convey food to a friend now starving in the castle, then——"

" Food to a friend ? " interrupted Bowden. " Bah ! Let your friends feed upon the seaweed, of which, in all conscience, there is an abundant harvest on the rocks, ready to their hand. I'll not believe that it was so trifling a cause that kept you out of your blankets on so cold a night as this."

" Have it your own way," protested Ruth, " but I declare to you that our business has been nothing more criminal. And I beg you to let us go our way."

" Not yet," returned Bowden. " 'Tis not in my nature to be deceived by such simplicity, and your youth and seeming innocence do but convince me of your mischievous intentions." He went nearer to her, looking full into her eyes. " Enough of this prevarication," he growled deep in his throat, " and

hand over to me the written message that you are taking from Sir Philip de Carteret to his lady in Mont Orgueil Castle ; for I'll be bound that such is your purpose."

Ruth met his scrutiny.

"Most assuredly it is not," she denied with unquestionable candour.

Captain Bowden looked perplexed.

"Then 'tis your brother who is the delinquent," he decided, and he turned his attention to Martin, but with as little success, for Martin, now apprehending the situation more clearly, deemed his best course to be that of keeping strictly to Ruth's misleading explanations.

Still Bowden was not satisfied that they were not cleverly deceiving him, and at the last he turned angrily to Coppinger.

"Have at them, Nick," he ordered. "Search them, and search them well. Rifle their pockets, and neglect not to overhaul the lining of the boy's doublet. Look well within the boots of both of them. Aye, search even beneath their babbling tongues. And be smart, d'you hear? Plague on them, they have already wasted over much of our time !"

Ruth did not resist their searching of her ; nay, she was even eager to prove to them that Captain Bowden's suspicions were groundless, and she hastened their work, knowing that every moment's delay increased the risk of their being attracted towards the cave by some incautious movement on the part of Perrotine de Carteret or her cavalier. As to Martin, of him they made a more thorough search, even compelling him to take off his boots to show them that he had not concealed a letter under the laces. All that they found in his pockets were such trifling treasures as a seaman's knife (which Coppinger

appropriated), a hank of fishing-line, the crumpled remains of a kestrel's egg and an old flintlock pistol. This last article naturally excited some suspicion, but when it was seen that the weapon was rusty and beyond all usage, it was restored to him, after the barrel had been duly probed and searched for a possible secret letter.

"No," reported Coppinger, "there bedn't nothin' here, zir; nothin' zave boyish trash. Shall us let he go?"

Bowden shook his head as he sheathed his sword.

"No," he decided. "For though you have found no letter hidden upon them, yet there is no saying that the youngsters bear not some dangerous message of conspiracy in their heads, and 'tis beyond all question that they are Royalists. No; let the pair of them be held prisoners and taken with us aboard the *Bramble*, and that speedily."

Martin Aylmer was dragged away struggling between two men. He had not calculated upon being carried off in this fashion, and he fought even now to make his escape. But Ruth permitted herself to be led down the incline of the beach, without any show of active resistance or attempt at hindrance. She was as anxious as Bowden was, although for a different reason, to hasten the men away from this place of her capture.

When they reached the water's edge, she saw that the cutter had been brought into the shoals at the extreme spit of the Guillemot reef and that the men, on coming ashore, must have waded through the shallows and clambered over the rocks for a long distance in their pursuit; but the two seamen who had been left in charge were now working her across the deeper water towards the spot where Perrotine



de Carteret's abandoned boat lay broadside to the beach. With the help of this smaller boat as a tender, Bowden hurried his men and their two captives on board the cutter, and they were in the act of putting off when Coppinger whispered the alarm that he had espied a party of soldiers stealing down the narrow pathway from the castle sally-port.

"*Qui va la?*" came an imperative challenge from the rocks.

Bowden made no reply, but only commanded his men to trim the sails, while four of his fellows worked at the long-sweep oars.

As the cutter, towing the small boat behind her, moved out into the moonlit bay, muskets were fired upon them from the castle, and there was a spattering of many bullets against mast and bulwark. Coppinger and Silas Cruse returned the ineffectual fire for some minutes, but soon the sails filled and the cutter drifted safely out of range.

Both wind and tide were against her, and she was carried beyond the castle rock before she could be brought over on the starboard tack.

As she crept back into Grouville Bay and came abreast of the Guillemot rocks, a misty cloud passed across the moon and the land was curtained in deep darkness. Ruth Aylmer turned her searching gaze in the direction of the Pixie's Cavern, in the faint hope that she might discern two shadowy figures stealing through the gloom from rock to rock. There was no visible sign. But if her keen eyesight could detect no movement, her sharply listening ears told her what she most desired to know. What she heard was a sea-bird's melancholy cry, coming from the land side of the Guillemot reef. It was thrice repeated. Yet the call was not so skilfully imitated that Ruth could not recognise in it the cadence of

a trembling human voice, and it seemed to assure her that Perrotine de Carteret and her mysterious companion had escaped from the cave, and were making their way unhindered towards the castle gates.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE KING'S LETTER

RUTH AYLMER had made no mistake when she judged that the sea-bird's weird cry from behind the reef had been the voice of Perrotine de Carteret, signifying that she and her young escort had escaped in safety from the cave, and were now making their way unmolested toward the castle.

While they had stood within the inky blackness of their place of refuge, they had heard the searchers approaching, and had seen the flickering reflections of Coppinger's torch playing dimly upon the walls and floor of the cavern, and they had kept very still, hardly daring to breathe lest they should betray their presence by even the slightest sound. Then the light of the torch had vanished ; there had been a scamper of footsteps across the outer rocks and shingle, and later had come Coppinger's call to his comrades saying that he had caught the " varmints," followed by Martin Aylmer's cries.

The young cavalier, whom Perrotine had consented to call in the future by the assumed name of Jack Merry, had once again drawn his sword, and was about to run out of the cave to the rescue of Martin and Ruth when Perrotine seized him firmly by the arm and drew him back.

"Nay, what would you?" she cautioned him in an alarmed whisper. "Did not Ruth Aylmer warn us to make no sound or movement? I implore you to leave the business in her hands, to deal with as she wills. Sure, her brother is there to protect her."

"But they are caught!" he protested. "The both of them are caught, I tell you; and in mistake for ourselves! These rebel ruffians will have no mercy upon them. I beg you to let me go. Dost think that I can allow your pretty friend to suffer and not make an attempt to rescue her?"

"Oh, rash that you are!" cried Perrotine, still clinging to him. "What harm can the men do? They will but question them to no purpose, and then set them free. Wait a little time, Master Merry, and do not expose yourself to the risk of discovery. You may rest certain that Ruth Aylmer will never betray our hiding-place."

He was silent for a while, but still leaned forward, intently listening, with his sword unsheathed.

"Ah," he said presently, "they mean to search them. Do you hear?"

"Let them search," returned Perrotine. "They will find naught of consequence. Fortunate is it that 'tis not I instead of Ruth who has fallen into their hands; for assuredly they would come upon his Majesty's letter that is at this moment hidden in my boot. Alas! 'tis as wet as a sponge from the sea water that I have been standing in!"

They heard Captain Bowden's orders to his men to take their two captives down to the cutter, and soon the crunching of retreating footsteps told that immediate danger was over. But it was not until the sound of the hoisting of sails reached her, that Perrotine considered it safe to peep out from the cave.

Then, having assured herself that the way was clear for an escape, she led her companion into the open air.

"By my faith!" he exclaimed as he saw the cutter drifting out upon the moonlit water, with the small boat towed behind. "Your Ruth Aylmer has acted most nobly. For I'll vow that it was she rather than her brother who planned and carried out this artful ruse. Oh, Mistress Perrotine, why did you prevent me from running out to her rescue? It puts me to shame as an arrant craven to think that I held back when she was so bravely sacrificing her liberty for our sakes."

Perrotine drew a deep breath, but she said no word. In her heart she was thinking that she herself had braved some few risks, and endured some discomforts in what she had done this night. Even now her wrists and arms were throbbing with weariness and her soft hands were blistered with her hard work at the oars. Yet all the recognition bestowed upon her for her pains was a complaint that she had not allowed him to rush headlong into the clutches of his enemies!

"What can have been the girl's reason for this generous sacrifice?" he questioned.

Perrotine shrugged her shoulders under her mantle.

"'Tis at the least impossible that Your Royal Highness can have been known to her," she answered meekly, signing to him to make his way in advance of her among the rocks in the direction of Mont Orgueil.

"Why, yes," he acknowledged, "I had not thought of that. To her, doubtless, I am but your soldier attendant and servant, sent out by Sir Philip de Carteret to escort you to your destination. By



which argument 'twas for your sake, Mistress Perrotine, and not mine, that she chose to act the decoy, and I congratulate you upon your possession of so devoted a friend."

But Perrotine shook her head.

"Nay," she denied, "Ruth Aylmer has no reason for such devotion as that; for I have done her no especial kindness. Rather was it that, being loyal to the cause of his Majesty, and seeing us pursued by these rebels, she guessed our purpose and knew that in helping us she would in some way be helping your father, the King."

"Hush! Hush!" he cautioned her. "I pray you remember that for the time we have hidden the Prince, and that I am now plain Jack Merry, cornet of Dragoons, at your service."

Perrotine urged him onward, and very silently they made their way along the shadowed beach until they came to the shelter of the Guillemot rocks. Here they waited. They had heard the guards emerge from the castle water-gate, had heard their unanswered challenge, and had drawn back in alarm at the sound of musket fire. From their place of ambush they watched and listened, until the cutter had passed out of sight and the guards had retired within the gates. Then, as they were about to proceed, Perrotine had caught sight of the cutter, creeping back into Grouville Bay, towing the small boat in its wake, and it was then that she put her open hands to her mouth and uttered the imitation of the sea-bird's wild cry.

"There, Jack," she said. "Ruth will know by my call that we are safe, and that her sacrifice of her own liberty has not been in vain."

"We at least may console ourselves with the certainty that her pretty face will protect her from

harm," reflected Cornet Merry. "For not even a rebel Roundhead could fail to be sensible of her beauty."

"Tush!" exclaimed Perrotine. "I vow you think more of that girl's pretty face than of all the dangers that you have passed through to-night."

"Yes," he admitted, with a laugh. "'Tis like to be the one lasting memory of our adventure. Nor will I rest content until I know that she is free."

"Your contentment will not come to-night, then," Perrotine told him; "and since that is so, I beg you to have thought of your own safety, which will not be assured until we are within the walls of Mont Orgueil Castle."

She led him to the ascent of the rocky headland, and they climbed upward without mishap until they came to the path under the outer ramparts, and round by the Mont Tower to the eastern postern. Here they were challenged by the sentinels, whose excitement over the unexplained incident of the cutter had not yet subsided, and who were even now on the alert to shoot down any intruder.

"*Qui va la?*" cried the sentry.

Perrotine answered: "A friend—a messenger from Elizabeth Castle to Lady de Carteret."

They asked for the password, and she gave it.

"In the King's name, pass a messenger from Elizabeth Castle," announced the guard, and Perrotine and her escort were allowed to enter as far as the inner gate, where again they were challenged and closely questioned concerning their errand before being admitted.

Within the courtyard a company of soldiers were being dismissed to their quarters. The flare of a flambeau shone upon their polished morions and corselets. Lady de Carteret, who was herself in

command, turned abruptly from them when the messenger was announced. She did not recognise her unexpected daughter until Perrotine flung back her hood and let her dark hair fall about her shoulders.

"'Tis I—Perrotine," the girl cried, going up to her mother and saluting in military fashion.

Cornet Merry also saluted and followed when Lady de Carteret led the way across the courtyard and through a wide arched doorway into a spacious hall, where a bright wood fire blazed upon the hearth. But within the door he came to a halt and stood at attention as if awaiting a command. Perrotine glanced round at him with a finger to her lips to enjoin a discreet silence.

"You can come forward to the fire, Master Merry," she said, "for I doubt not that you are even as cold as I am, and I know that your feet are wet," and to her mother, she added by way of introduction: "My escort is Master Jack Merry, cornet of Dragoons, newly come over with despatches from England."

Lady de Carteret inclined her head to the measure of his supposed subaltern rank, and turned so quickly to Perrotine that she did not observe the extremely courtly bow with which he acknowledged the introduction. All that she was aware of was the flash of a diamond ring on one of his fingers; but even this did not divert her attention.

"You have brought news—ill news—from Elizabeth Castle?" she inquired agitatedly of Perrotine. "What of Sir Philip? Is he well? What of the garrison? I trust that there are no signs of mutiny?"

Perrotine was unfastening the clasp of her mantle.

"My father is well," she answered, "—or as well as a wounded man may be, wanting wholesome food. As to the garrison, 'tis still firmly faithful, in spite of hardship."

"The hardship I can well believe," said Lady de Carteret, contemplating her daughter austere, "for you are yourself looking so pinched and white and utterly miserable, that I declare I should hardly have known you but for your voice, and even that doth tremble. Be seated, child, until my return from making the round of the castle to see that all is safe. Rachel shall bring you and your man a dish of warm milk. Yet ere I go"—she hesitated, "tell me, how came you here, a defenceless girl, braving the perils of a journey by night, when the rebels are abroad and every road and lane is infested with marauders seeking to do harm to honest folk? Where are your other attendants, and your chargers? For of course you have not been so foolish as to travel afoot?"

Perrotine removed her mantle, and threw it across the oaken settle before the fire.

"'Twas by the sea that I came, and attended by none but Cornet Merry," she explained, moving nearer to the fire, towards which her companion had already advanced. "Ours was the boat pursued by the cutter which your guards have been firing upon. But by great good fortune and the timely help of Ruth Aylmer and her brother Martin, who chanced to be near, we escaped with no more harm than a wetting and the loss of our boat; and his Majesty's letter, which I carry, is still safe."

"A letter from his Majesty?" cried Lady de Carteret in astonishment. She had been calmly austere and dignified until this moment, as befitted the responsible guardian of a king's castle and the

commander of its garrison, but now her austerity fell from her like a cloak and she betrayed a new eagerness of curiosity. "A letter from the King's own Majesty?" she repeated in agitation, as she quickly approached the settle where Perrotine had seated herself. "Oh, why were you so long in telling me? Give it to me this instant, that I may know its contents."

She showed her impatience by a nervous clasping and unclasping of her fingers.

Perrotine glanced aside at her calmly, while Jack Merry, standing by the fire, raised his hand to hide a yawn.

"There is no pressing urgency in the message, Mother," said Perrotine. "'Twill wait until your return from seeing that the gates are locked and guarded. I beg you to hasten Rachel with the warm milk, for I perceive that Cornet Merry is weary, and he is doubtless as hungry as I am myself."

"Cornet Merry, forsooth!" exclaimed her ladyship. "Marry! does he take this castle for an inn, and me for its hostess? If he is so hungry he had best retire to the guard-room, where your brother Lancelot may find him a biscuit and a corner of cheese. And indeed I know not why you did not send him to Lancelot at the first, instead of permitting him to enter our private apartments."

Jack Merry's shoulders were shaking with suppressed laughter, but Perrotine's pale face had flushed hot with resentment at her mother's unfortunate words.

"The guard-room among common soldiers is no place for a gentleman," the girl made retort as she stood up and proudly confronted her mother. "Master Merry is an officer in the King's own regiment of Dragoons, and 'tis only right that he



should be received with proper hospitality. Indeed, my father expressly bade me to tell you that such was his wish."

Lady de Carteret drew herself up with dignity.

"Enough, child," she said, "and believe that I need neither you nor Sir Philip to remind me of my duty towards a guest." And turning to the stranger, who was now facing her very demurely, she continued: "Pray, Master Merry, remove your cloak and be seated at the fire, while I command you some supper and inform my son that you are here."

He bowed to her politely and, as he unfastened the neck clasp of his mantle, she again caught the glitter of diamonds, as well as the rich chasing of his Dragoon's cuirass and the gold hilt of his sword. For the first time she now looked into his face, and was impressed by its refinement. Clearly she had committed a mistake in supposing that the guard-room would be a fitting place for so evidently distinguished a young gentleman.

"Perhaps you are of the Merrys of Leicestershire?" she ventured to remark, by way of showing some interest in him.

He revealed his white teeth in a very engaging smile.

"I had not even known that there was a family of my name in Leicestershire," he answered. "As for myself, your Ladyship, I am but town born; being of the parish of St. James's, in London."

"A fashionable quarter, at the least," she smiled back to him, "for 'twas there that Sir Philip and I took rooms, what time we attended his Majesty's Court. And well do I remember seeing the dear Royal children from our windows each morning, taking the air in the Mall with their nurses and all

their little dogs. 'Twas a part of our daily entertainment."

Cornet Merry smiled once more as he reflected that he was himself one of the dear Royal children of whom she spoke; and lest Lady de Carteret should observe his momentary confusion, he glanced aside at Perrotine, who sat near him with a foot across her knee, endeavouring, with seeming difficulty, to loosen an obstinate knot in her shoelace. Lady de Carteret followed his glance.

"*Mai grand doux*, Perrotine!" she exclaimed in a tone of reproof. "But what would you? What ails your foot, then? Is it hurt?"

Perrotine shook her head in response.

"'Tis His Majesty's letter that I have hidden in my shoe," she explained. "But so swollen is the cord with sea water that I cannot loosen the knot. I fear the letter will need to be dried at the fire ere it can be deciphered."

"I implore you to handle it tenderly," her ladyship urged. "We may defer the occasion of its reading if, as you say, 'tis not of pressing importance."

She went out of the hall, cautiously shutting the heavy door behind her, lest even there at that late hour of the night some intruder might enter.

Perrotine continued to struggle with the obstinate knot.

"Permit me," said Cornet Merry, and before she had time to offer an objection he had knelt in front of her and caught at her foot, resting it upon his knee, while he attempted in vain to untie the stubborn string.

"'Tis indeed an honour that I dreamed not of that a Royal prince should kneel at my feet," she murmured.

He looked up into her blushing face.

"The honour is to me, Mademoiselle," he answered gallantly. "And in truth 'tis due that I should kneel to one who has done so much for me as you have done to-night."

Perrotine was conscious that he looked far from princely at that moment. His long brown hair was moist with the sea mist and hung in lank wisps about his face and neck, devoid of curl ; his eyes were heavy with weariness, and his cheeks and hands were smeared with iron rust and the green slime of seaweed. She watched his fingers straining at the knot.

"Nay, trouble no more with it," she advised, and taking her dagger from her belt she handed it to him. "Pray cut the string," she said. And when he had done so and drawn off her shoe, they bent over it together on the hearth, where, within the flickering light of the sea-logs, they carefully withdrew the wet and crumpled letter.

Perrotine opened its flimsy folds and held it, spread upon her palms, before the warmth of the fire, swaying it to and fro, and turning it from side to side until the paper had regained some of its original crispness. As she did so, her eyes rested upon the ominous words, "*whom we declare to be traitors*," and then upon a name, the sight of which excited her impatient curiosity. She spoke the name.

"Andros Aylmer ? What then !" she exclaimed. "Why has his Majesty so particularly referred to Colonel Aylmer, I wonder !"

She spread the paper upon her knee and bent over it more closely to satisfy her newly-awakened interest.

"And is this Colonel Aylmer a friend of yours ?" questioned Merry.

"Marry, but he is the father of Martin Aylmer

and the foster-father of Ruth, who helped us to escape!" returned Perrotine.

"Read what is writ," he requested.

The words she read were certain instructions addressed to Sir Philip de Carteret, in which King Charles mercifully granted his free pardon to all rebellious inhabitants of the island of Jersey who should, within a given period, return to their former obedience and continue in their duty; and following this were the words:

*Nevertheless, out of this our gracious pardon we do except Benjamin Bisson, David and James Bandinel, Henry Dumaresq and Andros Aylmer, whom we do hereby declare to be traitors and misleaders. And we command you, our Governor, to apprehend and put in close prison these same malefactors, and to proceed against them with all execution and security, according to the laws.*

Perrotine stared at the letter in perplexity.

"'Tis plain, straightforward English, at the least," said the Prince, "and writ by my father's own hand withal. His meaning is clear, that your Andros Aylmer is proclaimed a traitor, to be immediately arrested and imprisoned."

"Yes," Perrotine nodded. "It is that which puzzles me. For Colonel Aylmer is a most ardent Royalist, whose loyalty to his Majesty has never been doubted. How then can he have been condemned as a rebel and a traitor? He is even now in England, fighting for the King against Oliver Cromwell; and if this be so, wherefore has his Majesty ordained that he shall be arrested and imprisoned here in Jersey? Surely there is some mistake! 'Tis passing strange. I do not understand."

"The one strange part of the business," said

Jack Merry, pressing the burning logs more compactly together with his foot, "is the circumstances that our rescuers, Ruth and Martin Aylmer, should have been the unwitting means of saving this same warrant for their own father's imprisonment. Had she known what was concealed within your shoe, Mistress Perrotine, I will engage that our pretty friend would have been less ready with her help."

But Perrotine shook her head in disagreement.

"You do not know Ruth Aylmer as I do, sir," said she, "and I for my own part will engage that, even had she been fully aware of the contents of his Majesty's letter, she would still have done what she did. But hush ! Someone comes."

It was Rachel who entered, carrying a tray with two steaming bowls of bread and milk. The old woman started and almost dropped her burden as she saw that Perrotine was not alone. She had believed that the second bowl of food was for Lady de Carteret, and had not expected to be seen by a masculine stranger. And now she hesitated to advance to the table ; for she had been aroused from her bed by the tumult of the turning out of the guard, and had had no time to take her hair out of its curl papers, or to do more than cover her night robes with a soldier's queminzolle.

"Odds my life !" she exclaimed. "But her ladyship said no word of there being a cavalier in your company, Ma'm'selle, or believe me I should not have entered, tricked out as I am like a very scarecrow." She placed the tray on a corner of the great oak table. "I do trust, Ma'm'selle, that 'tis no new disaster that hath brought you abroad at so unholy an hour," she went on, "yet I warrant me 'tis no childish whim that led you to face the dangers of the road, where every bush doth hide a lurking rebel,



and when the sea itself is a menace. Why, Master Lancelot and our soldiery have but now returned within the gates after fending off a whole fleet of the enemy's gun-ships that sought to take the castle by assault ! ”

Perrotine smiled at the woman's exaggerated report of the visit of Bowden's cutter.

“ Doubtless your own courageous assistance shared the glory of completing the repulse,” she suggested ironically, aware of Rachel's habit of hiding herself whenever danger was afoot.

Rachel carried the bowls and spoons to the settle.

“ *Ma fé*, no,” she admitted, “ I am no brave soldier woman like your mother, *Ma'm'selle*. The very sight of a loaded arquebus doth make me quake. No, so please you, I took timely refuge within the buttery. There my lady found me when she came to bid me prepare this sop, never so much as informing me who 'twas for withal.”

At this moment Lady de Carteret returned into the hall, with her cloak over her arm. She hung her pistol in the gun-rack and, advancing to the table, took up the King's letter from where Perrotine had left it. And while she read it by the light of the candles, Perrotine and Cornet Merry silently ate their frugal meal.

“ *Hein !* So it seems that by his Majesty's command, we are to place our good friend, Colonel Andros Aylmer, under arrest,” she reflected. “ 'Tis a task difficult of accomplishment seeing that he is absent in England.” She looked across at Perrotine, who was busy with her bread and milk. “ I presume that you have no news of his secret return to Jersey, have you ? ” she inquired.

“ Nay,” Perrotine answered. “ I have heard no

word of him since we were told that he was present in the battle of Naseby."

Lady de Carteret raised the King's letter to her lips and reverently kissed it.

"Prithee what business took Martin and Ruth Aylmer to Grouville beach to be so conveniently near with their help?" she questioned. "Have they, too, become infected with this rebel pestilence?"

"I asked them not," returned Perrotine, "but I will answer for their loyalty; and 'tis easy to guess that they were there with the purpose of watching for the sloops which are expected from St. Malo with supplies for the garrison. And indeed——"

She broke off abruptly, dropping her spoon and looking sharply from Lady de Carteret toward the curtained window.

"Hark!" she cried in alarm. "Surely I heard the firing of a great gun!"

The sound had come to her faintly as from afar. Neither of her companions seemed to have heard it; but it was quickly followed by the much louder boom of a cannon, which none could mistake.

Lady de Carteret slowly folded the King's letter and thrust it into her bosom.

"'Tis the guns of Elizabeth Castle, firing upon the town," she said very calmly. "The rebels grow more bold, and Sir Philip has lost patience with them."

Jack Merry rested his empty bowl upon the corner of the hearthstone and stood up.

"Your ladyship is evidently not aware that Sir Philip has not enough gunpowder left even to load an arquebus," he said.

"Wherefore," added Perrotine, "'tis not the castle guns, but the ordnance of some ship." She

paused, listening. "'Tis the sloops firing upon Captain Bowden's cutter," she decided.

"Then Heaven help Ruth Aylmer, who is aboard of her," murmured Cornet Merry, nervously fingering the hilt of his sword. And Lady de Carteret looked at him in surprise.

## CHAPTER VII

### IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

SATISFIED to know that Perrotine de Carteret and her mysterious fellow fugitive had escaped unharmed and undiscovered, Ruth Aylmer turned to consider the alarming predicament into which she had been thrown by allowing herself and Martin to be so easily captured and carried away. Not for a moment did she regret the spontaneous sacrifice of her own liberty ; for she realised that, whatever might have been Perrotine de Carteret's motive for venturing forth at midnight in an open boat, her mission was certainly one of vital importance, and that in all probability the consequences would have been most serious had Bowden and his crew of rebels not been decoyed away from their intended quarry. Whereas, for herself and her foster-brother, there could be no great danger, since they carried no message to betray and had no secrets to divulge, while even the circumstance that they were for the King could not be regarded as a criminal offence.

Yet the disconcerting fact remained that she and Martin were now prisoners in the hands of the King's avowed enemies, who believed them to be spies working in the interests of Sir Philip de Carteret and his cavaliers. Ruth was quietly sorry for herself ; but Martin was angrily distressed and sullenly disposed to visit his misfortune upon Ruth.

"Sure 'tis all your doing," he complained to her when they had been thrust by strong arms on board the cutter and he realised that they were already under sail. "Had you been more alert," he declared, "we might easily have escaped. 'Tis all through you that we are here, instead of at home in our beds. And what will these ruffians do to us, think you?"

"Not more than they would have done to Ma'm'selle Perrotine and the young cavalier who shared her danger, had they been in our place," returned Ruth.

"May be so," pursued Martin, "but had we taken to our heels ere we were caught, Perrotine and her cavalier would still have been safe."

"Yet scarce so safe as they are now, when the men have quitted the beach," Ruth reasoned.

Nick Coppinger heard the two captives whispering as they lay with their heads close together in the well, where they were overshadowed by the dark mainsail; and although he caught no word of what they said (for they spoke in the Norman French, which he did not understand), he yet opined that they were plotting some conspiracy, and he rudely separated them, sending Martin forward among the men at the bow, and bidding Ruth go to sleep under cover of a seaman's coat which he threw down to her.

Then he went aft to the stern.

"For all our zearching of them," Ruth heard him confide to Captain Bowden, "I wouldn't zay but what they birds we have caught do conzeal zome message under their wings."

"Ay, or beneath their eyelashes," growled Bowden, hitching the tiller under an elbow. "For I warrant you Sir Philip would never have sent them out from the castle only to take our attention from off the shallops. 'Twas their hot haste to escape us that



kindled my suspicions. Yet, as it has turned out, my suspicions were false."

"You'm zpeaking in riddles, Cap'n," returned Coppinger. "I know not what you'm driving at. What were your zuspicions, withal?"

Ruth strained her ears to hear Bowden's reply, and it astonished her when it came.

"Marry, but thou'rt a dull-witted churl, Nick Coppinger," he said. "What did I suspect? Why, that the youth in the boat's stern was none other than Charles himself—His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales—bent upon taking secret refuge in Mont Orgueil Castle! 'Tis that which I suspected, and with good reason."

"Body o' me!" exclaimed Coppinger, drawing back in amazement as from a physical blow. "The Prince of Wales? Nay, but you'm jesting, Cap'n; you'm jesting, for sure!"

"Prithee, whenever did you know me to jest?" retorted Bowden. "Dost suppose that 'twas but in jest that I deserted my own quarterdeck to-night to go off on a wild-goose-chase such as this that we have engaged in? My faith, man, I have something better to do than play at children's pranks. Had I not believed as I say, you may warrant I'd not have lost the chance of intercepting the shallops and preventing them from landing their cargoes. Why, even unto the moment when I bade you have a care not to do our captive any heedless injury, I was assured that he was none else than the Prince himself; for hark ye, Nick," he added, lowering his voice, "I have secret information that His Highness was put ashore at Elizabeth Castle yesternight. And what should that bode?"

"From the sloop that came over from England?" questioned Coppinger. "Certes, I had not thought

o' that. And what would your honour ha' done with him, had it indeed been he, and us had taken him prisoner?"

"Ah," returned Bowden, "there you do touch the tenderness of my disappointment at my foolish mistake. For I had planned at once to deliver him over to Monsieur Bandinel, who is now encamped behind Mont Orgueil Castle, and who, you may be sure, would have rewarded me handsomely for my cleverness. But, as you see, I have been prettily duped, to the wasting of our time; while Sir Philip de Carteret has been suffered for once to get the better of me."

He glanced upward at the sagging sails, and luffed.

Ruth Aylmer crouched closer in her corner and lay very silent. But her heart was beating furiously and her brain was in a whirl as she realised the true significance of all that she had overheard. She understood now the reason of Perrotine de Carteret's astonishing action in drawing her dagger to defend herself, and what she had meant by her hurried, incautious exclamation, "Quick! Your Royal Highness, quick!" Very clear to her now was the cause of Perrotine's willingness to let others be captured, while she and her companion took safe refuge in the cave. It was not for her own sake, but for the sake of the Prince, that she had been so eager to escape from the pursuing cutter.

Ruth wondered why it should be necessary for the Prince to escape from any man. Was he not the son of King Charles, and the heir to the throne of England? And who dared do him any injury? She did not know that the Prince of Wales was already a hunted refugee and that the rebel followers of Oliver Cromwell were seeking to do him harm,

as they were seeking to do harm to his father, the King. But Bowden's mention of Monsieur Bandinel, the chief conspirator and leader of the Parliamentary party in Jersey and arch enemy of all Royalists, informed her of the danger that had been avoided, and in her heart she fervently thanked Heaven that she had been the instrument of so fortunate an escape.

It had given her satisfaction to sacrifice her freedom for the sake of Perrotine de Carteret; but now the thought that in helping Perrotine she had also been of help to so exalted a personage as the Prince of Wales gave her a precious and unspeakable joy. What mattered it now what Bowden and his crew should do with her? All the pains and hardships that they might inflict were a small price to pay for the privilege of performing so useful an act of loyal devotion.

"Us would have been vastly better employed had us weighed anchor and zailed off in pursuit of the craft that us saw in the offing an hour ago," said Coppinger. "Her was one of Prince Rupert's privateers, I'll be sworn. And as like as not Prince Rupert himself was aboard of her."

Captain Bowden turned to the quarter in which the ship had last been visible, passing like a phantom into the mist.

"At the present time Prince Rupert is cruising in the Irish Seas," he explained, "and could not well be in sight off the isle of Jersey. I'd say, rather, that 'twas the ship of his brother, Prince Maurice, bound for Dartmouth and playing a profitable game of piracy by the way." He was silent for some moments, then he continued: "Even yet we might overhaul and capture her—a goodly prize—and hold His Highness a prisoner of ransom. Bah! I do grow mortal sick of this idle lying in port, a-waylaying

of worthless bumboats as we've been doing these three weeks past ! I'll have no more of such pettifogging police work. I am for flying at higher game, mark you. I am for roving the seas on my own free boot ; taking ships wheresoever they may be encountered."

"I allow there be much to be zaid in vavour of honest pirating," smiled Coppinger. He sat on the bulwark rail so near to Ruth that she could see the white of his eyes in the moonlight. His face was almost as repulsive to her as that of the other sea rover, whom she had seen but a little while before beside Gorey windmill.

"'Tis gold that I do covet, Nick," pursued Bowden, "glistening, jingling gold. And there is little of that commodity to be gained in the trade that we are now following. But gold I will have, though I go back for it to Barbary and, like Isaac Wincall, leave my two ears behind to adorn the casbah gates of Algiers."

"Ah, but you'm bound to the Parliament, Cap'n," Coppinger judiciously reminded him, "and bedn't no longer your own master."

"Parliament?" repeated Bowden with a rich disdain. "I care not a snap of the fingers for the Parliament, nor yet for the King. I've a frigate of my own, and, sink me, but I'll do as I list with her. Every blood-soaked plank in her is mine, earned by hard fighting on the main. She's mine from jib to lantern. I'll fly what flag I choose, and strike it to no man, be he pirate or prince."

"Yet for all that, you'm engaged by commission to Major Russell along to Guernsey, and bound to do his behests, bedn't you?" questioned Coppinger.

"That profitless commission was completed ere we left St. Peter's Port," returned Bowden, leaning

forward to look under the foot of the mainsail that obscured his view of the land. "And I'm free to lift anchor when I may. No ; there's but one man alone that I'd own as a master and willingly serve. One man alone, I say. 'Tis true that he is body and soul for King Charles ; but blow high, blow low, I'd follow him like a dog, though I'm old enough to be his father. Never a man is there sailing the British seas that knoweth more about the working of a ship than he. And as to taking a frigate into action—name me the sailorman that's his equal !"

Coppinger stood up and stepped across the narrow deck.

"You had ever a zoft place in your heart for young George de Carteret," said he. "For I well know that 'tis him that you mean."

"The skilfullest mariner alive," commented Bowden. "And, mark my words, he'll be Lord High Admiral of England ere long. Learned his craft among the Barbary Corsairs, he did ; and a better school you'll not find on all the wide salt seas."

Ruth Aylmer had closed her eyes. In spite of her uncomfortable position and the ceaseless rocking of the cutter, she found it difficult to keep awake. At Bowden's mention of Perrotine de Carteret's sailor brother, however, she raised her head a little, hoping to hear something which might tell her if Captain George's ship were by chance cruising in the neighbourhood of the Channel Islands. But no more was said, and presently she slumbered, dreamily unconscious of her strange surroundings.

When again she awoke, the cutter had rounded La Roque Point and was abreast of the wilderness of rocks known as the Banc des Violets. By the moon's light Ruth made out the dark, sea-girt pile of Elizabeth Castle, and between the castle rock and the cutter



were the shapes of several ships. On board the cutter the men were moving about excitedly. Some were loading their muskets and pistols, while two were charging a brass three-pounder cannon, mounted on a swivel at the prow. Bowden was still at the helm, looking exceedingly perturbed.

"Now," said he to Coppinger, "if the *Bramble* doth but help us by opening her guns upon the shallops at the fitting moment, they are caught in a very pretty trap. Let them hear the music of our three-pounder, Silas," he shouted.

"Ay, ay, sir," returned Silas Cruse, who was blowing at the glowing point of his linstock.

Ruth rose to her feet and peeped over the gunwale. She could see the three French sloops bearing towards the castle, and knew them by the cut of their sails. They were accompanied by a larger vessel, which sailed in their wake, quickly overhauling them on their windward side, and coming therefore between them and Bowden's cutter.

"Let fly at the brig, Silas," cried Coppinger. "Take her in the hull and sink her!"

Silas had already levelled his piece in her direction. Ruth saw him glancing along the shining brass barrel. He waited a moment, and then applied his fuse to the priming. The little cannon spat forth its shot and flame and smoke with a concussion which shook the cutter as if she had grounded upon a sunken rock. A splash of spray rose from under the brig's bowsprit, and the shot bounced from wave to wave like a stone that is flung along the surface of a quiet pool, doing no harm.

"Ah!" exclaimed Coppinger in disgust. "You'm too quick by var. You'd ought to ha' waited ten zconds longer, and you'd ha' took her 'twixt wind and water. Load up again!"

Silas again charged his piece and again fired, but with a like result.

"Blame that frigate!" muttered Bowden. "Why doth she not open her broadside? Are the hands enjoying a drinking bout in our absence, or what? Why are her petrieroes silent?"

Ruth saw what she took to be the frigate, lying quietly at anchor between the advancing shallops and the castle, showing no sign of an intention to engage in any gun practice, and seeming as if neither the provision shallops nor the cutter were any concern of hers.

Coppinger and his mates, boldly showing themselves in the light of a lantern, were levelling their muskets upon the brig when that vessel suddenly went about, and bore direct for the cutter. The flare of torches illuminated her lower sails, and now from the midst of her dark hull there came a bright flash and the deafening report of a heavy gun, followed instantly by the crashing of timber. The cutter staggered with the impact as a shot struck her main mast. The mast swayed and fell over, and Ruth Aylmer, flung from her feet, was buried beneath the weight of a confused tangle of canvas and cordage

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAPTAIN GEORGE DE CARTERET

“MARTIN ! Martin !” she cried, struggling to release herself from the stifling load. She believed that the vessel was sinking, and that she would be carried down with it into the depths. She fought nervously, excitedly, to get free, but seemed only to enclose herself more tightly in the mesh. “Martin, oh, Martin !” she cried, as a second shot from the brig boomed forth. But Martin also had been pinned down by the wreckage, and was helpless.

Bowden and his crew meanwhile were slashing with their knives at the halliards and stays which held the fallen mast and encumbering sails. They dragged the canvas aside and lifted the heavy spar. Ruth struggled to her feet and clambered to the level deck, panting and agitated. She looked about her wonderingly, and saw that the brig was already close alongside. Her decks were crowded with men, whose morions and breastplates shone in the mingled light of the moon and many flaming torches. Even Ruth recognised that she was a ship of the Royal Navy, and the golden eagle, which was conspicuous among the decorations at her bows, seemed to be an indication of her name. She appeared to be about to run the cutter down ; but just as she came within a few fathoms of a collision, she glided smoothly round and, with a noisy flapping of sails, drifted broadside to

the smaller vessel, upon which grappling hooks were promptly flung.

Ruth glanced up to her towering poop, above the muzzles of a row of great guns that protruded from her open ports, and she saw a group of cavaliers who leaned over the bulwarks, looking down upon the disabled cutter. One of them climbed into the nettings above the main chains.

"Ha, Master Christopher Bowden," he cried in a clear, youthful voice. "So 'tis you, as I guessed! I do trust that none of your crew are hurt. Dos't need any help, prithee? I am truly sorry to have crippled you; but 'tis your own fault—entirely your own fault. You have no lawful business here, you know, firing upon a King's ship with that pretty pop-gun of yours; the which you aimed monstrously badly, let me tell you."

Bowden, as well as Ruth Aylmer, had recognised him before even he had spoken. Ruth saw the glisten of his teeth under his small black moustache, and she thought him very handsome as he stood there supporting his balance so easily in his perilous position. He seemed exceedingly young to be the commander of so large a ship; but she already knew him to be the youngest captain in the King's naval service.

"I'd no notion that 'twas you, Captain de Carteret," Bowden called up to him apologetically. "Though in truth I might have known that it could be none else, by the seamanly way you have outwitted me, sir. None other could have done it so cleverly. Yet had my men aboard the *Bramble*, yonder, not been asleep or drunk, I vow you would not have crippled me so easily."

Captain George de Carteret laughed a boyish laugh.

"Your men on the frigate are both wide awake and commendably sober," he answered back. "As you

will discover when you return on board after your pleasuring trip, and receive the instructions which I have left for you."

"Instructions?" repeated Bowden. "Prithee what may be their purport?"

"Need you ask?" returned the young officer in the tone of one accustomed to command and to be obeyed. "They are, that you do forthwith, and ere another hour be past, heave anchor and quit these shores with man and mouse; nor dare to return, unless it be under another and more honourable banner than the rag that you have been so impudently flying at your peak these weeks past. Do you understand, friend Christopher? You see, 'tis neither customary nor politic that you and I should sail under different colours."

Christopher Bowden winced and then looked up with cunning in his beady eyes.

"I had thought, peradventure, that you would be changing your own," he said. "For 'tis clear that you are but clinging to a lost cause."

Captain de Carteret cast upon him a glance of contempt.

"Never!" he declared proudly. "'Tis but cold-blooded weaklings like yourself who turn their coats with every changing wind. Others may desert their duty, Captain Bowden; but not I."

Bowden stood for a full minute in sullen silence, as if he were mentally weighing his chances in a balance. Then abruptly he looked up at De Carteret and slowly, sheepishly, raised his hand to the salute.

"Little reck I what colours I display, or what coat I wear, so it turn to my own profit," he confessed. "And since your honour deemeth the flag of St. George a fitting one to fly—well, I know no reason why it should not suit me also."



"Then in the King's name fly it, and none other," commanded De Carteret. "And now, if you wish not that I should drop a shot through your bilge, sheer off, ere the tide turn, and hie you back to your ship. In sooth," he added, "I know not why you left her to go gallivanting along the coast. What has been your particular game to-night, friend Christopher?" he inquired. "And what, by the way, is the meaning of the empty boat that you have in tow? 'Tis not a ship's boat; that I can see with half an eye."

"No," Bowden answered with a shrug of his shoulders, "'tis just an abandoned cockle-shell that I found along the beach. By the look of it, I opine it belongeth to Elizabeth Castle, where, believe me, it shall presently be returned."

"'Tis but common honesty that you should return it to its rightful owners," De Carteret nodded. "And 'tis kind of you to be so considerate of my father's property, seeing that you have considered him so little in other and more important matters. And so you would have me believe that you left your ship to-night merely to pick up this deserted boat, eh? A pretty story, o' my conscience; a pretty story! Was it then upon an empty boat that you fired your muskets, which I heard an hour ago?"

He put this question with seeming carelessness, but Ruth Aylmer, who was watching him from the shadows where she crouched unseen, perceived that he awaited the answer with some anxiety. Did he know who it was that had escaped in this same boat?

Bowden moved uneasily and glanced around as if to assure himself that neither of his prisoners was near. Had they not been, perhaps he would have taken refuge in a falsehood, but he saw Ruth Aylmer's eyes fixed upon him from where she knelt, half-hidden

behind the folds of the fallen sail, and he deemed it expedient to tell the truth.

"Nay," he answered meekly. "I'll allow that the boat had occupants when I perceived it guiltily creeping forth from Elizabeth Castle. And being that I was stationed there to frustrate all passing of messages betwixt the castle and the shore, you'll admit that I but did my bounden duty in giving chase."

De Carteret bent further towards him, holding on by one of the shrouds.

"I'll admit that you did your work as a meddling and mischievous spy," he declared angrily. "And prithee how fortun'd your fugitives? Of course, they escaped? They escaped, and are now safe in Mont Orgueil?"

Bowden meditatively scratched his chin.

"No, Captain George," he answered slowly. "None knoweth better than your honour's self that 'tis not my habit to do my work by halves."

"What?" cried De Carteret. "You captured them?"

Bowden permitted himself to smile.

"Even as I intended to do," said he, "and a pretty dance they led me, forsooth. Though to be sure, when I questioned them, and searched them, 'twas little enough that I got for all my pains; for they told no secrets and carried no letters."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Carteret in a tone of satisfaction. "Since they held their tongues and you set them free, there is no harm to grieve over."

"Nay, but I said not that I had set them free," rejoined Bowden. "'Twas not to my humour to be deceived by their seeming innocence, and I'll be bound that I shall yet pluck their secrets from them, once I get them in my cabin."

It was obvious to Ruth Aylmer that Captain de

Carteret was not so ignorant as he was pretending to be. She could not see his face, but his eagerness was unmistakable when next he spoke.

"Produce me your prisoners!" he cried. "Produce them, that I may know who and what they are!"

"Nay, I can tell you that, without your seeing them," returned Bowden. "They are of small consequences, withal; being but a pair of guileless chickens of the brood of one Andros Aylmer, who keepeth the farm of Bow Deserts, or some such name. Mayhap you do know him, sir?"

As he spoke, he stepped forward and, taking Ruth by the arm, drew her forth into the light of the flaring torches.

"Here be one of them, Master George," he announced.

Ruth raised her eyes to where young Captain de Carteret stood with his back to the rigging, and she saw the look of relief, mingled with curiosity, which came into his handsome face at the sight of her.

"Aylmer?" he repeated, and he spoke the name with contempt. "Oh?" he muttered curiously, as though trying to understand a thing that was not clear to him. "I know the girl, I know her very well. And the other, who is the other, Christopher? You said there was a pair of them."

Ruth moved a step forward.

"'Tis my brother Martin, sir," she explained.

De Carteret turned to leap back upon his own deck, but waited a moment to put a question to Ruth.

"What rebel's mischief have you been meddling with to-night, child?" he asked imperatively.

"No rebel's mischief," she answered boldly. "I am no rebel,"

"Eh?" He looked at her quickly, accusingly. "By my faith, but you are the daughter of one, though; and I'll be sworn that you are tainted with the infection. What was your spying business at Elizabeth Castle? How came you to be abroad so late at night, if not to dabble in mischief that I am sure you can ill understand?"

Ruth glanced round anxiously at Bowden and then upward at the men who were leaning over the brig's quarter rail, eagerly listening and watching. Then she fixed her eyes pleadingly upon George de Carteret; to him alone would she have spoken, and not even to him, save in secret.

"Well?" he pursued.

"I cannot tell you, sir," she faltered, "not here, or now."

Captain de Carteret waved his hand in dismissal.

"Away with them, Bowden," he ordered. "Do as you will with them. They are no concern of mine."

His ship still had way on her, her sails drawing, and she was towing the helpless cutter along at her side. Ruth saw him swing himself round to drop lightly to the deck, and heard him give orders to his seamen to loosen the grapples. Bowden had released his hold of Ruth's arm, and now the girl hastened forward to the bow, in search of Martin. A cloud had swept over the moon, and in the dim light she had difficulty in finding him; but she discovered him at last, engaged in helping Coppinger and Silas to make a clearance of the wreckage. She went up to him and drew him aside.

"Come, Martin!" she bade him. She was trembling, partly with cold and partly with a strange, new agitation which had come upon her. "Follow me—quickly!" she whispered, her eyes glistening,

her cheeks flushing, every nerve in her body tingling with the eagerness of her purpose.

“Whither?” he questioned blankly.

“Nay,” she urged, “seek no reason, but come!” And, believing that he was close at her heels, she went aft again.

The grappling irons had been cast off, and the space between the two vessels had begun to widen. She saw the dark, yawning gulf that separated them growing momentarily greater. Without an instant’s hesitation, then, she mounted swiftly to the low gunwale and flung herself bodily forward against the brig’s bulging hull.

Bowden saw her, but before he could leap across to stop her, she had gripped the chain-plates and climbed upward, agile and fearless, hand over hand into the rigging, where George de Carteret had been standing a few minutes before. There she stopped, panting in her excitement, clinging desperately to the shrouds, and looked back searchingly for Martin. He had been following her, but Bowden had arrested him, holding him back, and at the same time calling aloud to the seamen on the brig, bidding them seize the girl, and return her to him as his prisoner.

But already the brig had gone over on a new tack, leaving the cutter astern of her.

Ruth saw nothing but the hungry, black waves beneath her, touched here and there with a trembling reflection from the portholes of the lighted cabin. Her foothold on the unfamiliar ratlines was insecure, and she dared not turn, dared not move, lest she should be plunged headlong into the pitiless sea. Fearing to cry for help, she waited in patient silence for many painful minutes. But at length her terrors and the torture of her cramped fingers and the cutting ropes overmastered her.



"*Haro ! Haro !*" she called aloud for the second time that night ; and her voice of despairing agony sounded strangely weird throughout the quiet ship. The torture was terrible now. Her brain reeled, her hold was slackening, her limbs were numb beyond control. But at last, someone was coming—at last !

It was Captain George de Carteret himself who came to her rescue. He had been pacing the weather side of the quarter-deck with one of his officers, and, startled at her cry for help, he had turned to see her clinging to the rigging with the now bright moonlight shining upon her golden hair and wan, white face.

"*Mort de ma vie !*" he exclaimed, crossing the deck. "Hold tight !" he shouted. And vaulting to the bulwark, he caught at one of the stays and flung his free right arm around her, just as her hands relaxed their grip.

"*Très-ba !*" he said gently. "Have no fear, I am holding you."

Her head fell back on his arm. She had closed her eyes ; he saw that she had fainted. Lifting her bodily, he carefully bore her beyond the rigging and lightly leapt with her to the deck.

There he rested her very tenderly against the support of a gun-carriage, and stood back, gazing upon her in astonishment.

"Now what in the name of all that is mysterious may be the meaning of this ?" he cried, looking aside at two of his officers who had approached. "How came she there, d'Avranche ? Dids't see her climbing ?"

"I saw her not ere she called for help, sir," answered Lieutenant d'Avranche, as much mystified as his commander. "Yet 'tis clear that she climbed upward from Chris Bowden's boat."

"*Ma fé*, yes ; that much at least is clear," agreed

De Carteret, "for she was one of his prisoners, and stood beside him when I declared that her father was a traitor. But wherefore came she here? And, being here, what are we to do with her?"

This last question he partly answered for himself by bending down and lifting Ruth into his strong young arms, as though she had been a little child.

"Lay aft in advance of me, Le Pella, and open the cabin doors," he ordered. "Bid Jackson prepare a hot drink for her at once, for she is cold, poor demoiselle, and I doubt not hungry also. . . . Keep the ship on her present course, d'Avranche."

He bore Ruth down the companion stairs and into a spacious, brightly lighted-cabin. There he hesitated, looking toward a cushioned couch under the stern windows.

One of the ship's gromets, or midshipmen, came forward, amazed to see what the commander was carrying.

"Put me the pillow to the head of the couch, Hubert," De Carteret requested. "Yes, that is well. And now summon the surgeon."

He deposited his burden softly upon the couch and taking her hand in his, gazed down into her beautiful face with its frame of golden hair, its closed eyes and shapely nose, its dimpled cheeks and tight-shut lips. He spoke her name, and his voice was as tender as a mother's.

"Ruth!—Ruth!" he murmured.

Her eyelids trembled, her lips parted. He could see the pearly gleam of her teeth. She sighed.

The ship's doctor entered, still wearing his night-cap.

"An accident, sir?" he inquired, bustling towards the couch. "One of your officers wounded?" Then he drew back. "*Certes!*" he ejaculated in

surprise. "It is surely a mermaid—the first I have ever seen!"

"No, doctor," smiled De Carteret, "'tis no more than a mischievous rebel, come aboard of us to take refuge from Christopher Bowden. The colour returns to her cheeks, I see. Nevertheless, you had best take soundings of her pulse, and prescribe what remedies be needful."

He stood back against the table, watching.

"Nay, I discover no ailment," the surgeon presently reported. "'Tis but a natural exhaustion, sir. A cup of warm soup, with maybe a spoonful of your Portugal wine added: followed by a few hours' sleep, and I warrant you she will be as strong as an amazon ere next meridian."

"'Tis fortunate that we have a vacant cabin," said De Carteret, signing towards a closed door. "Even its late tenant could scarce object to so fair an occupant of his apartment."

Lieutenant Le Pellay, who was a native of Jersey and had recognised Ruth Aylmer, glanced at his commander in surprise.

"Do you mean, sir, that the girl is to inhabit the state-room of his Royal Highness?" he ventured timidly to inquire.

Captain de Carteret answered sternly:

"Ay, marry! Is't not good enough, think you?" And taking a lighted taper, he strode to the door which the boy Hubert had opened at his advance, and entered the adjoining cabin.

When he returned, Ruth was sitting up, wide awake, and drinking from a cup of hot chicken broth, while Lieutenant Le Pellay stood in front of her, holding a silver tray, upon which were some ship's biscuits and a glass of ruby wine.

"Nay, I beg you to offer me no more," she was

saying, "and, believe me, I am not ill. I am but very weary."

"Of your weariness I make no question," interposed Captain de Carteret, advancing towards her. "At such an hour as this, you ought to be dreaming in your sleep at home in Beau Desert."

"Would that I were," she fervently murmured, rising and putting her empty cup upon the tray. "But so please you, sir," she added, smoothing her ruffled hair, "I am ready to go ashore whensoever I may."

"Whensoever you may will be a consideration for another occasion," he returned firmly. "In the meantime, you will occupy the cabin which I have prepared for you." He signed in the direction of the state-room. "You will find all that you need, and you shall not be disturbed. But in the morning, I warn you, I will question you closely concerning this rebel's mischief that has kept you from your rest." He bowed to her politely. "Good night."

She looked at him pleadingly, wistfully, and would have spoken freely but that they were not alone. She tried to show him that she wished to speak, but he did not understand.

"Good night," he repeated.

"Good night to you, sir," she responded softly. "And so please you, I am indeed no rebel, and have done no rebel's mischief. I have done naught of which I have need to be ashamed, were it known even to his sacred Majesty the King himself."

He held the door open for her. She entered, and he closed it slowly, turning the key.

"By my faith, I heartily hope that what she said is true," he muttered anxiously. "Dost believe in her, Le Pellay?"

Lieutenant Le Pellay shook his head.

“Not I,” he answered decisively. “It seemeth to me that you are over indulgent to her, sir, and have been cozened by her pretty face. I beg you forget not his Majesty’s present instructions for the arrestment of her father. Andros Aylmer has been proscribed as a conspiring traitor. Is it likely, think you, that Aylmer’s daughter would betray his schemes?”

“You are right,” nodded De Carteret. “’Tis the maid’s uncommon comeliness that has taken me, as it has always done. Her eyes and voice have beguiled me to a false belief in her honesty. But I will be wary. Yes, I will be very wary. She shall not deceive me longer. To-morrow you will see that I shall wring her secrets from her. Ay, even as I’d squeeze the water from a sponge!”



## CHAPTER IX

### HOW CAPTAIN DE CARTERET SQUEEZED THE SPONGE

It was late on the following morning when Ruth awoke suddenly at the sound of three strokes of the ship's bell. She sat up with a start, and looked with dazed eyes at her strange surroundings. She was perplexed at first by the moving ripple of glaring light upon the ceiling above her, and it was many moments before she understood that it was a reflection from the sunlit waves, entering by the open portholes. The ship's slow heaving and the tinkling splash of water perplexed her also for a time, until she fully realised that she was sailing upon the open sea. But it was the room in which she had slept which surprised and interested her the most.

When Captain de Carteret had ushered her within, there had been four candles burning ; but she had blown three of them out ; for she was accustomed to undress and plait her hair in the dark, and she kept the remaining candle alight only until she had assured herself of the position of the bed, and had found a comb and brush on a tiny table beside the pillow. But now, in the full light of day, all the dainty luxury of the cabin was apparent to her, and she sat regarding it in childish wonder and astonishment.

She had been used to think with pity of all shipmen, and to deplore their life of hardship and privation ;

but there was no sign of privation here, and if this was an example of a seaman's sleeping berth, then surely all her pity had been idle and uncalled for.

She saw that the bed quilt and curtains were of rich silk, bordered with beautiful lace ; the sheets were of the finest linen. On a table of carved mahogany that stood against the bulkhead, there were bottles of cut glass, with silver tops, and little boxes, also of silver ; and above it there was an oval mirror, the like of which she had never before beheld for size and splendour ; and all else—the chest of drawers, the wardrobe, the washstand and all the fittings and furnishings—seemed to her similarly designed for comfort and convenience, as well as for richness in ornament. She was abashed when she considered her own unworthiness to sleep in such a place. How different from her poor, bare little room at home ! It was as though some fairy's magic wand had transported her into a region of dreams.

When she alighted on the floor, the carpet was soft as velvet to the tread of her bare feet. She was alarmed at the ship's lurching, and had to steady herself with hands outstretched to some support when she made her way to a porthole to look out. A fresh, cool breeze fanned her face as she stood on tip-toe to peer forth upon the world. It was not the familiar sight of green meadows and blossoming orchards that greeted her now, as they had greeted her every bright spring morning at Beau Desert. What she saw was the wide, far-reaching blue of the restless sea ; and the sight shocked her with momentary terror at its desolation, while at the same time it thrilled her with the unspeakable joy of a desired experience.

All her life through she had yearned with a

passionate yearning to be afloat as she was then. Since ever she could remember, she had loved the eternal sea, in all its varying moods ; and the wish to be sailing over its blue expanse in some tall ship, with spreading white sails, had been as it were an instinct of her very being. But now the joy of the longed-for reality was marred by the fearful thought that she was being carried away from her home, like a captive bird that had been taken from its nest. From where she stood she could see no land ; nothing but the rippling sea and the limitless sky ; and no living creature was visible save a far away gull that flew on indolent wings in the morning sunlight.

She drew back with a little shudder of dismay ; but calmed herself with the reflection that perhaps at the other side of the ship the land might still be near. And, encouraged by this fervent hope, she hastened to dress herself, so that she might presently go up upon the deck to make sure that they were not taking her upon a long voyage into some distant, unknown clime.

Captain de Carteret had spoken truly when he told her that she would find all that she needed in the cabin. She found water in a silver ewer standing ready in a silver wash-basin, with a soft towel beside it, and soap that gave forth the delicious, homely perfume of wild violets ; and never before had she dressed her hair with such a beautiful comb and brush. Perhaps it was because she stood at a clear mirror and could see herself so perfectly reflected, but she had not been previously conscious that her hair was so brightly golden, or that her eyes were so deeply blue as they now seemed to be. The fresh, keen air and the cold water in which she had washed had brought the roses to her cheeks, and her lips were like ripe cherries for redness. But Ruth Aylmer

was never vainly aware of her own beauty ; she did not know that it was a possession to be admired, and if she lingered now before the mirror, it was only because of her childish pleasure in using a brush so vastly superior to her own at home.

When she was ready, and had made the room tidy, she went to the door and stood beside it, hesitating to open it, remembering only then that she did not know her way about the ship, and that all the crew were strangers to her excepting Captain de Carteret and Lieutenant Le Pellay, who might not easily be found. At length, she had courage gently to turn the handle ; but the door did not yield. She tried again, but without avail. Surely it was locked ! Was she a prisoner there ? She dreaded the alarming possibility. Nervously she struggled to open the door, and rapped upon it imperatively with her knuckles.

Then she heard some one moving. A key was turned in the lock.

“ *Bon-jour, Mademoiselle,*” said Captain de Carteret, standing in front of her, dressed now in a sombre suit of russet-brown cloth, without cuirass or sword. “ *Es-to gentiment ?* Pardon my delay in opening the door ; but, as you see, I am at breakfast. And since I am alone, I shall be pleased if you will join me in the repast.”

Ruth looked up at him shyly.

“ *Bon-jour, Monsieur,*” she timidly responded. “ But as to breakfast,” she added, glancing at the gorgeous table ; “ it seems to me that I may well wait until your worship has seen fit to put me ashore ; and the more so since ’tis scarcely likely that you would endure sitting at table with a mischievous rebel.”

“ ’Twould ill become me to deny you the common hospitality of my ship,” said he. “ And believe me, I had thought only of combining two duties ; for I

purpose, while we are eating, to listen to your necessary explanations."

He conducted her to a chair, and ere they were both seated, a turbaned negro servant brought in a savoury dish of bacon and poached eggs, with a steaming jug of coffee.

"Had we before been alone, Captain de Carteret," Ruth began when the servant had withdrawn, "I do assure you that you should have had no need to await my explanations. But believe me, I dared not speak when others were present, to overhear what it might be dangerous that they should know."

"Dangerous to the fulfilling of Colonel Andros Aylmer's cunning conspiracies?" observed Captain de Carteret questioningly, the while he filled her coffee cup and passed it towards her.

Ruth leaned back in her chair, unwilling to touch the proffered food while yet he doubted her.

"Of Colonel Aylmer's conspiracies, if indeed he be a conspirator, I have no knowledge," she retorted quietly. "And 'tis news to me that he, who fought for the King so bravely in the late battle of Naseby, can deserve the name of traitor."

De Carteret smiled incredulously. He avoided looking at her, lest he should be unduly influenced by the childlike innocence of her face.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle Ruth," he said, idly breaking a biscuit, "but your history is somewhat at fault. Let me inform you that Colonel Aylmer's fighting on that occasion was wholly upon the side of Cromwell's Roundheads, and that therefore he is a traitor of the deepest colour."

"Sir, I refuse to believe you," Ruth declared very firmly. "Andros Aylmer is a gentleman of honour and a true servant of the King's Majesty."

"And when, if you please, did you last see and



have speech with this surprising paragon of loyalty ? ” De Carteret asked with contemptuous irony, still keeping his eyes averted from her direction.

“ Many months since,” Ruth answered feebly, “ when he went over to England at the time of the beginning of this rebellion.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed her host with a quick glance, which he as quickly withdrew. “ Do you dare to pretend that you are not aware that he is at this moment in Jersey, working his worst for the undoing of the King’s loyal subjects ? Marry, but you have a fair share of audacity, miss ! Maybe you would also have me believe that it was not he who commissioned you and your meddlesome brother to go a-spying in your boat yesternight to Elizabeth Castle ! ”

Ruth crisped her hands nervously. What was the meaning of these extraordinary accusations ?

“ We went not anywhere near to Elizabeth Castle,” she declared with emphasis, “ and were in no boat. If you would know, ’twas of our own free will that we went out, with the laudable purpose of giving warning to your shallops coming over from St. Malo, to let them know that the frigate was lying secretly in wait for them.”

“ Aha ! ” cried De Carteret in surprise. “ This is truly interesting. And so ’twas you—you—who displayed those misleading signals from the rocks ? Body o’ me ! ’tis well that the shallops heeded them not ! Else might they indeed have fallen into the trap which Andros Aylmer laid for them.”

“ Misleading ? ” repeated Ruth in amazement. “ Andros Aylmer ? I do not understand. Sure the shallops obeyed the warning, and yet came to no harm ! ”

“ They would have come to harm enough to suit

your father, had I not myself foreseen such a possibility, and so prepared their way into safety," returned De Carteret sternly. "As it happens, however, you made the mistake of flashing your lantern light from the lower rocks, instead of from Gorey windmill, where, I may tell you, the proper signal was duly displayed by a trusty member of my own ship's company."

Ruth looked at him sharply.

"The man without ears?" she cried with swift recollection.

"Ah, then, it seems you encountered him upon the heights?" De Carteret raised his eyebrows curiously. "Yes, I allow that Isaac Wincall has left his ears to be bleached in Barbary. 'Tis clear you saw him. Dids't speak with him?"

Ruth shook her head.

"Nay, I shunned him," she answered. "We but heard him trolling a fearsome forecastle song of piracy, which chilled my very blood."

De Carteret smiled.

"A gentle wight that would not harm a fly," he said, pressing her plate toward her. "Pray take some breakfast, Mistress Rebel," he urged. "For even a rebel must eat."

Again she shook her head.

"You have not yet heard my full explanation, sir," she reminded him. "There is, for example, the question of the boat. How, think you, could we have seen your Isaac Wincall beside Gorey mill, and at the same moment be escaping in the boat which Captain Bowden pursued from Elizabeth Castle?"

"'Tis a problem that had not occurred to me," he acknowledged lightly. "Yet of the two possibilities, I prefer to believe the more likely one—that

you were both in the boat, and were overtaken and captured by Christopher Bowden as you sought to escape by way of Grouville Common."

Ruth smiled then, and took up her fork, breaking the egg on her plate and watching the yellow yolk stream slowly to the edge.

"Let us not beat about the bush, Captain de Carteret," she said, suddenly raising her eyes and fixing them upon his handsome face, "for I am truly hungry, and my breakfast is getting cold. In brief, then, 'twas your own sister Perrotine who rowed that boat. She and her companion escaped into Mont Orgueil, while Martin and I did willingly allow ourselves to be arrested in their stead, and in mistake for them."

Captain de Carteret had started forward, staring in astonishment at the girl's bent head as she whispered a grace, before beginning to eat.

"Death of my life!" he cried, overcome by a great excitement. "'Twas Perrotine, you say—my sister Perrotine? Then who and what manner of person was her companion?"

"Marry, who else should he be but the exalted person whose sleeping-cabin I so unworthily occupied last night?" Ruth responded softly. "For I doubt not that 'twas in this same ship that His Royal Highness was brought over from England, to be secretly landed at Elizabeth Castle."

De Carteret stood up and paced the cabin for many minutes in moody silence, the while Ruth was eating. Presently he halted beside her and laid his hand gently upon her shoulder. It seemed that he had guessed much that she had not yet told him. But he questioned her, and bit by bit she explained to him all that had happened, even to the smallest detail.

“And you betrayed not a word of this to anyone?” he finally asked. “Not to Bowden nor to any of his crew, nor even to Martin Aylmer? You told no one of your conjecture that Perrotine’s companion was the Prince of Wales?”

“Had I been a rebel, as you supposed,” she answered him proudly, “I might indeed have so lowered myself.”

“So also might many a wavering Royalist—for the sake of the thousand golden pounds which is the price offered for his Highness’ capture,” he reminded her.

She rose to her feet and directed her large, earnest eyes to his face.

“Not for a thousand thousand golden pounds, and the saving of my own life to boot, would I have betrayed my secret to a living soul except yourself, Captain de Carteret,” she declared.

He stared at her steadily for a while, and slowly, like the changing sky, his eyes lost their austerity and assumed an expression of tender softness.

“Ruth Aylmer,” he said, taking her hand and raising it to his lips, “I do verily believe you; and I will trust you always, whatever befall. For you are in truth a loyal subject of whom any king might be proud. And I—I, too—am proud of you, and will ever remain your true and steadfast friend. And may God bless you always for what you have done.”

## CHAPTER X

### A PALTRY SUBALTERN

“ So ’tis to you that we owe the loss of a good night’s rest ? ” said Lancelot de Carteret, meeting Perrotine in the outer courtyard of the castle on the forenoon following her arrival with the King’s letter. “ ’Twas bold of you to trust yourself to the danger of an open boat, with none to defend you but a paltry subaltern, who could not even lend you a hand with the pulling of the oars ! ”

Lancelot de Carteret was a tall, soldierly gallant of nineteen, who, while presenting the dignity of stalwart manhood, still retained many of the traits of an irresponsible schoolboy. He had been a collegier at Eton, where he had gained some renown alike for his scholarship and his adroitness with the rapier ; but the disturbances of the Civil War had driven him, with many another ardent young patrician, away from the companionship of the Sixth Form, and the frowns of Headmaster Norris, to take arms for the King ; and, having received his baptism of fire, and a wound in the arm, in the battle of Naseby, he had returned to his home in the Channel Islands to take a man’s part in the defence of Mont Orgueil.

“ A paltry subaltern, indeed ! ” echoed Perrotine, hiding her annoyance with an effort. “ But I’d have you know that he is, nevertheless, a subaltern in a very respectable regiment !—none other than the



King's own Dragoon Guards, to wit. Pray," she added, "have you had speech with Cornet Merry this morning? I trust that he has had comfortable quarters."

"Comfortable enough for any soldier, and I doubt not a vast deal better than he has been accustomed to," answered Lancelot. "Yes, I have but now been making the fellow's better acquaintance in the guard-room, where I discovered him playing a laggard game of chess with Captain Legge. There I sought for his account of your surprising adventure; but 'twas precious little that I got from him—as little almost as he got from me, for all his impertinent questioning. I do believe he takes me for an insular simpleton who knows naught of the great world, and who is ready to give him all the information he asks for concerning our affairs in Jersey. Of one thing I am persuaded, Perrotine, and that is that your friend is not by any means all that he seems. He has the swagger of a common trooper, rather than the air of a gentleman. I like him not."

Perrotine smiled to herself. It was clear that Master Jack was playing his assumed part successfully.

"Not all he seems!" she exclaimed, with well feigned surprise. "Do you suppose, then, that he may be in reality a rebel spy, masquerading in our midst? I trust that you gave away no secrets?"

Lancelot meditatively stroked his upper lip.

"Never fear," he said wisely; "I am too wary to loosen my tongue in the presence of one whose politics are so doubtful."

"Then you indeed suspect him of disloyalty?" she mischievously inquired.

Lancelot raised his eyebrows to express indecision on the point.

"For one thing, he shows less respect for the

King than is becoming in an officer in his Majesty's service," he responded slowly. "And then his curious interest in the family of Aylmer has certainly awakened my suspicions."

"Said he anything concerning Ruth?" Perrotine questioned with a quick tinge of jealousy.

Her brother looked at her sharply.

"Faith, he'd better not dare!" he gallantly threatened. And then he added with a confident smile: "But why should he? Having seen her only in the darkness, and then but for a moment, how should he have paid any regard to her? No, he has shown no particular interest in Ruth, I am glad to say."

Perrotine shrugged her shoulders.

"Ruth Aylmer, however, has other recommendations than her personal beauty, as you well know," said she, watching the red flush mount to her brother's cheeks and brow. "And even Jack Merry may be permitted to appreciate the bravery which she displayed last night. 'Twas such bravery as I myself could never be capable of! Her noble sacrifice of herself has troubled me sorely; so sorely that I have scarcely slept for thinking of her. Nor shall I be satisfied until I know that she and her brother are free."

"Ruth Aylmer's abnegation of her liberty on your behalf I well can understand," returned Lancelot, "for she has never been slow to show her devotion for you; while her brother Martin could have done naught else than he did in standing by her as I hear he did. But the conduct of this fellow, who calls himself a soldier, was arrant and despicable cowardice!"

"Cowardice?" Perrotine's face was never so comely as when her dark eyes flashed with indignation,

and she was indignant now. "*Mai grand doux!* But can you not at least give him credit for having stood by, as he did, to defend your sister?" she cried in reproach. "Would you have had him abandon me to my helplessness for the sake of protecting Ruth Aylmer, who had no King's letter concealed within her shoe, as I had in mine?"

Lancelot had moved to continue his way across the courtyard, but now he turned with an angry frown.

"*Ma fe!*" he rejoined sternly, "had I been in the craven's place, d'you think that I should have done as he did? Would I not have protected you both? Why, I'd have thrust the pair of you securely within the cave and defended the entrance even with my life! But he was afraid to do that, if he ever thought on't in his selfishness. That he should have allowed Ruth to fall into that rascal Bowden's clutches, and not stir hand or foot to save her, was a monstrous neglect of proper gallantry, and a disgrace to anyone pretending to be an officer and a man of honour."

"You misjudge him," Perrotine protested. "'Twas I, not he, who was to blame for Ruth's arrest. For he did truly try to go out of the cave to her assistance, and would surely have done so, but that I held him back. As to Ruth and Martin—they were innocent of all offence: they carried no message; they held no political secrets; and I doubt not that already they have been set at liberty and have returned to their home at Beau Desert."

"Therein you are wrong," declared Lancelot. "Think not that I have been content without making inquiries concerning their fate. Even before you had retired to your room last night, I was abroad. Disguised as a fisherman, I tramped into St. Helier's,

and there discovered that Bowden's frigate had departed, carrying the two unfortunate prisoners away in her ; I know not whither."

"Mercy me !" exclaimed Perrotine in dismay. "What will become of them ? Alack ! and 'tis all my fault !"

Lancelot was looking beyond her towards the arched doorway of the guard-room, where young Cornet Merry stood leaning with his shoulders against the stone wall, his arms folded, the while he idly watched the sparrows pecking for food among the grass.

"Whatever Ruth and Martin may have to endure, 'twill be less than you and your friend would have had to suffer in their place," Lancelot assured her as he strode slowly towards the embrasured battlements.

Perrotine walked at his side. She now realised more surely than ever how providential had been Ruth Aylmer's intervention, and she drew a deep breath of relief as she thought of the Prince's narrow escape ; for, had he indeed been in Martin's place, he must certainly have been identified as a far more important and significant prisoner than Martin Aylmer could ever be considered.

"I cannot divine the reason which took those two to the Pixie's Cavern so late at night," Perrotine said wonderingly as they drew to a halt beside one of the castle guns.

"They were there for the unnecessary purpose of signalling to the shallops," her brother told her, resting an elbow on one of the gun's trunnions.

Perrotine glanced at him in questioning surprise.

"'Twas the old picaroon, Isaac Wincall, the quartermaster of *The Eagle*, who informed me of this," he went on to explain. "I encountered him near

the town, and learned from him that our brother George had instructed him to signal to the boats from Gorey windmill. Whilst Isaac was there at his appointed post, a maid with golden hair ran out like a frightened coney from the shadows of the mill, carrying a lighted lantern beneath her mantle. 'Twas Ruth, without a doubt. He watched her, and afterwards discovered her uselessly displaying her lantern-light to the shallops, which were already obeying Isaac's own more proper signal. He lingered no longer, and so he knew nothing of your being pursued by Bowden's cutter: neither could he explain the firing of the great guns which so alarmed us, albeit he was ready to declare that they were the guns of *The Eagle*, although how that can have been I know not, since George has not been in port these four days past."

Whilst she was listening, Perrotine had turned to look back expectantly toward the door of the guard-room, and a strange agitation now seized her. The companion of her last night's adventure was approaching. His stride was more confident, his bearing more proudly dignified than could be expected in a "paltry subaltern." It is true that he was dressed as a civilian, rather than as an officer of Dragoons: that no burnished corselet covered his buff leather jerkin, and that instead of military jack boots, polished and spurred, he wore plain laced shoes. He carried his sword in its scabbard across his arm, and in the hand that supported it he held a posy of primroses. But despite his disguise, there was something of assurance in his manner, which to Perrotine's eyes seemed nevertheless to betray his exalted rank, and her trepidation became painful as she watched his approach.

How should she greet him? She knew that she



ought to make an obeisance to him, and perhaps even kiss his royal hand ; but to do so in the presence of her unsuspecting brother would be dangerous, and she earnestly hoped that the Prince himself would avert the necessity. As he advanced and raised his hand, she observed with satisfaction that he had discreetly discarded his diamond ring. She moved a step towards him as he drew near, and, as though by accident, she dropped her filmy lace handkerchief at her feet. He stopped abruptly, clipping his heels together, and bowed to her with courtly elegance, gracefully sweeping the very ground with the dragging plume of his cavalier hat.

“ Give you good morrow, Mademoiselle,” said he with studied humility. “ I trust that your adventure has left no ill effects upon you ? ”

Perrotine adroitly picked up her handkerchief, and, in so doing, contrived cleverly to let him understand that she meant her action to be recognised as a curtsy.

“ A good morrow to you, Master Merry,” she responded. “ And I trust that you, too, have suffered no ill. Has’t slept well ? ”

“ As to that,” he smiled, “ I was so dog weary that, i’faith, I could e’en have slept soundly upon the edge of a knife.”

Paying no heed to Lancelot’s surly looks, he then very graciously presented his posy for Perrotine’s acceptance, succeeding at the same time in slipping a tiny note into her hand.

Lancelot strode nearer to them, turning reproving eyes from one to the other.

“ It seems to me that you forget yourself, Merry,” he said with offended dignity. “ Such very brief acquaintance as yours with my sister can hardly

warrant your present audacious familiarity." Jack Merry smiled, unabashed.

"Sure a cat may look at a king," he said lightly. "And believe me, sir, the brevity of our acquaintance is no measure of its depth."

Lancelot took protective hold of his sister's arm.

"Come, Perrotine," he urged softly. "Let us take ourselves to the upper battlements, where we can observe what is going on at the rebel's encampment."

Perrotine glanced over her shoulder at the Prince.

"You may accompany us, Jack," she invited. "I doubt not that you will enjoy the prospect from the topmost towers."

Jack? At her use of this familiar form of address, her brother frowned once more.

"Why should he accompany us?" he objected.

"Because I desire him to," Perrotine answered gently, and she signed to the Prince to follow at her side.

Her reason for wishing him to be with her just now was that she had resolved, after due consideration, to reveal his true identity to Lancelot, and the seclusion of the upper battlements offered a fitting opportunity for making the important disclosure in safe privacy, and thus putting an end to her brother's unintentional, but nevertheless disconcerting rudenesses; and she desired further to consult with the Prince and Lancelot as to whether Lady de Carteret ought not also to be taken into their secret.

It was true that her father had strictly enjoined her to keep the matter entirely to herself, until she should receive permission to confide it to her elders. Sir Philip had impressed upon her the fact that the Prince was personally in danger; that he was a hunted

refugee, for whose apprehension a high reward had been offered by his enemies, the leaders of the Parliamentary party. It was of the greatest importance to the Royalist cause that the presence of the Prince of Wales in Jersey should not be discovered by the Roundheads' spies, and that, therefore, the knowledge of his identity should be confined to as few persons as possible.

Sir Philip had advised that it should be left to the Prince himself to inform Lady de Carteret, and it was only in obedience of this advice that Perrotine had introduced her companion to her mother under an assumed name. It was not that her ladyship could not be trusted; but she was already overburdened with cares, and Sir Philip wished to spare her the additional anxiety of knowing that the Heir to the Throne was living in disguise under her protection.

Until now, Perrotine had faithfully complied with her father's instructions. But the responsibility was becoming too great for her; she had encountered so many difficulties and obstacles, that it seemed to her impossible that she could continue the deception with any hope of success. She wanted the help of some one older and more capable than herself. Wherefore she had resolved that Lancelot, if not also their mother, should share her secret.

But first she would consult with the Prince, and she intended to speak with him presently, when they should reach the seclusion of the battlements.

Whilst the three of them were mounting the winding stone stairs of the Keep, she took the precaution of opening the note which had been thrust into her hand, thinking that it might have some bearing upon the situation. Dropping behind when she came to one of the loopholes where there was

light, she lingered for a moment to read what the Prince had written :

*Mademoiselle—I commend me unto you, and beg you still to tell none that I am who I am. Bear yourself discreetly, as heretofore, and do in all things as Sir Philip has wisely advised. I beseech you to give me your earliest news of our blue-eyed rescuer, that I may know if she is safe from harm ; for though she be the daughter of the veriest scoundrel, yet would I not be ruthless.*

*Charles.*

“ Ruthless ? ” Perrotine repeated that last word wonderingly. What did he mean ? But ere she had asked herself the question she understood his lightsome play upon the name of Ruth Aylmer. It appeared, then, that he was anxious about Ruth—anxious to know if she had escaped, anxious even to see her again. What would he think when presently she should inform him that Ruth was still a prisoner in Bowden’s frigate, and that she had been carried off across the sea to some unknown destination ?

Perrotine folded the letter and, concealing it beneath her belt, followed up the stairs. She regretted now that she had invited Jack Merry to accompany her ; for if she must obey his written wish and still keep his identity a secret, then his presence here with Lancelot only added to the danger of some accidental discovery on Lancelot’s part. Her argument was reasonable, for indeed within the next few minutes such a danger presented itself, and was very narrowly averted.

At the head of the stairs, Lancelot opened a trap-door and led the way out upon the breezy battlements, high above the blossoming land. Eastward, across the blue channel, they could see the low lying shores

of Normandy, and far away in the offing there sailed a tall, majestic ship, her bellying canvas shining white, and her gilded poop glistening in the spring sunlight. So distant was the vessel that it was barely possible to discern that she flew the British ensign of St. George.

"Had I not known otherwise," remarked Lancelot de Carteret meditatively, "I should have said that yonder ship was none other than *The Eagle*."

"She has certainly *The Eagle's* rig," added Jack Merry, with the air of one who was not wholly ignorant of the differences in ships.

Perrotine laid a cautioning hand upon his arm. But Lancelot had caught the unexpected remark.

"And pray how happens it that you, who are a landsman, know aught of *The Eagle*?" he demanded.

"Marry, but have I not seen her lying in Dartmouth harbour?" promptly returned Merry. "And wherefore should I not know her, seeing that my very good friend George de Carteret is her commander?"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lancelot with newly-awakened interest. "You had not told me that my brother George was your friend!"

"He has long been the friend of my father," incautiously rejoined Merry.

Lancelot looked at him curiously.

"So?" he said, with a supercilious lift of the head; "and if I may be so inquisitive, pray, who and what is your honour's father? Is he by chance the same Merry who keeps the ship-chandler's shop on Dartmouth quay?"

Alarmed at the perilously impudent question, and half fearing, half hoping, that it would be answered with a deserved retort, Perrotine quickly intervened, placing herself between the two youths.



"Nay," she cried. "I am well sure that it cannot indeed be *The Eagle* ; for you may be certain that George has gone off in pursuit of Bowden's frigate, to rescue Ruth and Martin Aylmer."

"Body o' me !" exclaimed Merry, seizing upon that last piece of news. "And is it true that Bowden did carry them off as his prisoners ?"

"Of a certainty," Perrotine answered. "Even as we ourselves would have been carried off had not they been providentially taken in our stead. Alas, that we should be powerless to help them in their distress !"

"Let us hope that your brother George will liberate them," returned the Prince, with a quick glance toward the distant ship. He drew back from the parapet where he had been standing. "At the least," he added, "their case is scarcely so serious as you seem to fear, Mademoiselle ; and assuredly 'tis less serious than your own would have been. For since they are of the household of the outlaw, Andros Aylmer, you may count upon it that Bowden, who is in the rebel's employ, will not detain them long."

"Odso, that is very true," agreed Lancelot, "if it indeed be certain that Colonel Aylmer has deserted his duty ; which I find it hard to believe."

"Marry !" cried Cornet Merry. "Have you not his Majesty's own warrant to arrest the rascal as a traitor ? You put it mildly when you ask if he has deserted his duty. Duty, forsooth ! why, the man has gone over body and soul for Cromwell !"

Lancelot shrugged his shoulders incredulously.

"'Tis not commonly known in Jersey," he said. "And why his Majesty should have instructed us to arrest him, passes my comprehension."

"Where is Colonel Aylmer at this present time ?" Perrotine inquired.

"Nay, how should I know?" returned her brother. "It may be that Master Merry can inform us."

Merry shook his head, however.

"All that I can say is that he is believed to have crossed over to the Channel Islands," he announced: "though that may be mere idle rumour."

Perrotine and Lancelot followed him to the landward side of the battlements, and they all three stood there for a while, gazing through an embrasure at a party of men at work with spade and pickaxe, on the sunlit slopes beyond the castle walls.

"What are they doing—those men?" Perrotine inquired.

Lancelot smiled.

"'Tis a band of Roundheads digging their trenches and throwing up their ramparts," he explained. "They have been thus at work for days past. Major Lydcott, who, as you know, has lately been appointed by the rebel Parliament as their acting Governor of Jersey, in opposition to our father, is daily furthering his plans against Mont Orgueil Castle; which he covets for his official residence. Dost see the rider on the black charger, under the trees? That is Master Lydcott himself. The two sombre-looking Roundheads to his rear are David Bandinel and D'Assigny."

"Bandinel?" repeated the young Prince at his elbow. "Ah, I have heard his name from your brother George. 'Tis he who has had the audacity to plot schemes with Cardinal Mazarin for the sale of Jersey to France. Little wonder that he has been included in the warrant. A most mischievous rascal! 'Twould be well if you could arrest him even now and confine him in one of your castle dungeons!"

"Come!" exclaimed Lancelot, accepting the

suggestion, "I perceive, Master Merry, that you are a more soldierly Royalist than I imagined! Pray, have you yet seen anything of active service? Dost know the meaning of a charge of cavalry? Can'st handle a sword, or fire an arquebuse?"

Jack Merry cast an amused smile at Perrotine.

"I will not boast," he said modestly; "yet I hope I am not wholly ignorant of military movements."

Perrotine smiled back at him. She knew that, young though he was, he had already commanded his troops on the field of battle. She knew that even at the age of fifteen he had held the high rank of a full General in the King's Army, and had fought as a grown man at Edghill and Naseby.

"Because," pursued Lancelot with an air of conscious superiority, "if you should feel disposed to engage in a little warlike exercise, and can make shift to keep your seat on horseback, there is some sport in store for you to-day. I see that Lydcott has mounted a couple of pieces of ordnance down there. This is a new move, and we must prepare to meet it. I wonder if my mother is aware of what is going forth?"

At that moment Lady de Carteret herself emerged from the stairway, carrying a roll of bunting under her arm. She wore a soldier-man's cuirass and helmet, and there was a sword at her side and a pistol in her belt.

"Odds life, my dear mother!" laughed Perrotine. "I declare thou dost look like the very goddess of war herself in that soldierly costume! 'Tis vastly becoming to your heroic figure!"

"A truce to your nonsense, child!" frowned her ladyship, dropping her bundle at the foot of the flagstaff. "Come, Lancelot," she cried. "There

is work to be done. Lydcott, it appears, means to pay us a visit to-day, and has been bribing more of the inconstant islanders to join him. Dost not see them advancing?"

She pointed downward to the wide expanse of Grouville Common, where a filmy cloud of dust rose among the blossoming gorse bushes.

"But I am prepared to give them a warmer reception than they expect," she declared, proceeding to loosen the halliards of the flag-pole.

Lancelot, seeing her purpose, went to her help, and in the space of a few moments the royal standard was fluttering bravely in the breeze. Lady de Carteret stood back and looked upward to assure herself that it was well displayed.

"Let the rebel mob insult that flag if they dare!" she nodded. And all four of them, standing side by side, loyally saluted the emblem of the cause which they were prepared to defend.

## CHAPTER XI

### ROYALIST AND ROUNDHEAD

“AND now, Lancelot,” said Lady de Carteret, “go you down and take the copy of his Majesty’s proclamation which you wrote out for me on the parchment. Carry it out to the land-gate, and there with the sound of trumpet, nail it securely, so that those who choose may read it and know the King’s mind. And as you pass through the guard-room, bid Captain Legge order match to be lighted and guns loaded, and to muster the garrison in full force in the courtyard.”

Lancelot saluted the commandant in military fashion as he passed her and hastened to obey. Cornet Merry, likewise saluting, followed closely at his heels.

Perrotine was minded to call the Prince back, fearing that in accompanying her brother he might recklessly expose himself to some personal danger. But she reassured herself in the reflection that the Roundheads were not near enough to do any harm, and she remained on the tower, while her mother went the round of the guns and decided which of them would be of immediate use.

When they descended to the courtyard, they found two companies of cavalymen standing by their chargers, ready to mount. A similar number of infantry soldiers were ranked in the rear with pike



and arquebuse. Lady de Carteret, attended by Captain Legge, walked from end to end of the lines, inspecting them with critical eye. Then she drew the officer aside.

"'Tis clear that the enemy intend to make a combined assault upon the castle," she said calmly. "But if we are prompt there is little need for us to fear them. I propose to proceed to the attack ere they are fully prepared, and take them by surprise."

"We are ready to do your ladyship's bidding," returned Captain Legge. "And if your ladyship will take charge of the heavy guns, which are loaded and primed, and so cover our advance, and our possible retreat, I plan to attack them in two divisions on their right and left flanks."

"Good," the commandant nodded. "So you are careful to protect yourselves from being surrounded; the plan is to be approved since it will enable you to work to the rear of their entrenchments. Yet remember, I beseech you, that I wish not for bloodshed, but rather, if possible, to deprive them of their munitions and to make capture of their leaders. His Majesty's instructions, which you have read, must be followed, and I will not consider your exploit a success unless you bring me Lydcott as well as Bandinel and his son as your prisoners. Bisson and Dumaresq are still in Guernsey."

She turned aside as Lancelot and Cornet Merry came towards her, attended by a corporal and a trumpeter. They had each donned a cuirass and steel cap, with spurred jack-boots and cavalry sabres, and they strode to the chargers which were waiting for them. Lancelot carried the parchment proclamation, which he had written out in French as well as English, and the corporal was provided with hammer and nails,



LEANING SLIGHTLY OVER FROM HIS SADDLE TO PERUSE THE  
WRITTEN NOTICE



"I entreat you to be most careful," whispered Perrotine into the young Prince's ear as he was mounting

She thought he looked very splendid on horseback as she watched them ride off through the gates and across the drawbridge. She escaped from her mother and made her way to the barbican, whence she could see what happened further.

The displaying of the standard from the Tour du Mont had evidently been regarded by the Roundheads as a message of defiance, for they had dropped their spades and picks, and were cleaning their muskets while waiting the arrival of their reinforcements, already marching toward them along the Grouville road. Two horsemen had left the neighbourhood of the trenches and were riding slowly in the direction of the castle. Perrotine watched them as they advanced down the slope of the hill. One of them was the same whom Lancelot had pointed out to her as the Parliamentary Governor, Major Lydcott, and his companion she knew well to be David Bandinel, the aged Dean of Jersey, one of the most active and mischievous of the enemies of King Charles. Bandinel's name was written large on the warrant which Lancelot now carried. Was he destined to be the first to read the public declaration of his own conviction as a conspirator and outlaw?

Lancelot had halted now beside one of the tall gate-posts of the outer fortifications and, with the help of Corporal Sicklesmith, was nailing the parchment to its place on a level with his shoulder. But just as he had driven in the last nail, Bandinel turned abruptly and spurred his horse to a canter in the direction of the advancing reinforcements.

The trumpeter then sounded a loud blast, and

while the shrill fanfare rippled over the land, Lancelot and the Prince returned across the drawbridge, followed presently by the two troopers. Perrotine kept her eyes fixed upon the movements of Lydcott.

He sat his saddle with the soldierly ease of a cavalier, but with his clothes of sombre black, his plain white collar and his tall steeple hat, his clean-shaven face and close-cropped hair, he seemed to have ostentatiously affected the very extreme of Puritan simplicity. Very deliberately he rode toward the gate, halting close beside the post and leaning slightly over from his saddle to peruse the written notice, in which he appeared to take a lively interest.

"Ha, Master Lydcott," murmured Lady de Carteret, who had come to Perrotine's side by the wall of the barbican. "'Tis fruitful reading, I promise you ; but 'tis a thousand pities that your own name is not writ beside the others of your treacherous crew ! "

His grimly severe face was now in the sunlight, and his thin lips seemed to be forming the words that he read. His hands twitched nervously at the bridle of his restless black charger, which was disposed to turn its tail to the notice. Yet the man persisted in his endeavour to read to the end, both the French and the English

In his eyes, no doubt, the King's clemency in offering pardon to the common people who had temporarily deserted the royal cause, was rendered futile when accompanied by the harsh declaration that the ringleaders were to be excluded from all hope of mercy. Suddenly he whipped out his sword, and Perrotine saw him adroitly rip the parchment from the nails that held it. He caught it in his left hand as it fell and, crumpling it in his fingers, dug his spurs into his horse's flanks and rode off at a gallop back to the trenches.



With a cry of consternation, Lady de Carteret turned to order one of her men-at-arms to send a bullet after him ; but ere any could obey, Lydcott was already hidden from sight.

Presently, however, there were signs of a new activity among his followers, and it could be seen that they were bringing their two pieces of brass ordnance into position to play upon the drawbridge and gates of the castle ; whereupon Lady de Carteret discharged a brace of shotted sakers from the ramparts into their midst, throwing them into confusion, and driving them to seek shelter behind friendly mounds from the missiles that whistled over their heads.

In the meantime, the ill-disciplined reinforcements, composed of a rabble of farm labourers, fishermen and townsfolk, armed with billhooks, pikes and staves, had moved out of sight beyond the higher ground.

Perrotine had not heard her mother's instructions to Captain Legge, and she had therefore no knowledge that it was intended that the soldiers should go out and give battle. She was anxious to discover whether the ship which she had seen from the upper battlements was indeed *The Eagle* ; and accordingly she returned to the tower, not for a moment supposing that in her absence the cavaliers would be riding out of the castle.

The garrison had been marshalled in two companies, fully armed. One division was to be commanded by Captain Legge himself, and the other by Lancelot de Carteret, with Jack Merry as his lieutenant. It was planned that the two detachments, advancing by different routes, should, upon reaching the farther slopes of the hill, make a simultaneous charge upon the besiegers. De Carteret's party were to attempt to turn the enemy's position, while Legge was to enfilade in front.

Even as Perrotine came out upon the battlements, the cavalcade was clattering across the drawbridge and making for the grassy level beyond. With consternation she saw that the Prince was riding at Lancelot's side, risking his precious life to disperse a rabble of reckless islanders. They rode as if they were going out a-hunting rather than to join in serious conflict with a desperate and fanatical enemy.

She even heard the Prince's boyish laughter in response to something which her brother had said. She watched them crossing the open ground and presently drop into single file as they entered a narrow, sheltered lane bordered by low bushes, above which their helmets glistened. Had the enemy been aware of the approach, or even had their guns been loaded, a well directed discharge along the narrow defile must have annihilated every man, but Lancelot de Carteret, exultant and confident, had no thought of risk.

He came upon the rebels' encampment unexpected, and deployed while the Roundheads were engaged in unharnessing their horses and unlimbering their guns. He first announced his presence by a volley of musketry, and taking advantage of the panic, immediately charged at the head of his men, completely routing his adversaries, who incontinently abandoned their artillery and had difficulty in even rescuing their horses.

Made aware by the musket fire that the action had begun, Captain Legge impetuously charged down upon the other wing and turned a surprise into a headlong retreat. On the shoulder of the hill he encountered Bandinel and his staff, who galloped off without so much as pausing to exchange a pistol shot, Legge and his cavalry following in pursuit. Then a sharp and well-timed cannonade from the castle completed the victory, and the guns

of the vanquished, with their equipage—shot, match, ramrods, sponges, arquebuses and rests, spades, wheelbarrows and other implements—became the spoil of the conquerors, who afterwards conveyed them in triumph to Mont Orgueil.

In the beginning of the flight, David Bandinel and his son broke off from the main body of the Roundheads; but Captain Legge and four of his troopers gave chase, overtaking them within half a mile of the trenches and capturing them.

The sortie had been so unexpected and so rapid that Major Lydcott, the one capable and experienced soldier on the Parliamentary side, had been unable to take active part in the engagement. While the cavaliers from the castle had been advancing in ambush, he had been at the far rear, superintending the removal of a barrel of gunpowder from a neighbouring farmstead, and preparing to convey it to the trenches for future use in the intended storming of the castle. The rattle of musketry had alarmed him, but he lingered to help his men to lift the barrel upon a sledge and hasten with it to the front, employing his own black charger to draw the burden over the uneven ground.

Suddenly he found himself in the midst of a noisy mob of his own people, in flight before Lancelot de Carteret's cavaliers. His immediate companions abruptly abandoned their work and joined in the panic of the retreat, leaving him alone with his horse dragging at the loaded sledge, and attached to it by rope traces which he was unable to loosen without dismounting.

Lancelot, who was well in advance of his company of troopers, saw him and wheeled round, while the cavalry, led now by Jack Merry, flashed past him to continue the pursuit.

Lydcott had dismounted, and was busily severing the traces, when De Carteret, riding up to him, adroitly caught at his horse's bridle. But before he could lead the animal away, Lydcott had again flung himself into the saddle and drawn his sword, with which he made a fierce cut at Lancelot's arm. Lancelot alertly parried the blow with his own weapon, but in doing so perforce released his hold of the bridle, which the other seized. For some moments the two horsemen fenced vigorously at close quarters, slashing and thrusting at each other and dexterously parrying, neither getting the advantage. Lydcott's horse, however, not being trained for battle, was peevishly ill to manage, and it curveted and pranced impatiently, until it got to the farther side of the sledge, thus separating the combatants, who, lowering their weapons, stared one at the other across the dividing space.

"How now, then, young jackanapes?" Lydcott spoke coolly. "What mean you by thus giving chase to my friends? If you are wise, you will call off your godless pack and return to Mont Orgueil, there to invent a more reasonable declaration than the useless one which you lately posted at your gates. And whilst you are about it," he went on, "I recommend you to append a genuine signature. 'Tis but the folly of your youth to suppose that any sane man in Jersey would regard your notice as aught but a silly imposture."

De Carteret looked round anxiously to ascertain if any of his men-at-arms were near to support him in case of need.

"You shall have speedy enough proof of its genuineness," he retorted hotly.

"Oh, 'tis no concern of mine," declared Lydcott.

"It is the concern of every one who owes duty to

his Majesty the King," pursued De Carteret with an angry frown.

"And since my duty is to a mightier than he, I repeat, it concerns me not," rejoined Lydcott. "Therefore leave me."

Lancelot touched his charger's side with his spur and went nearer.

"It is not my intention to leave you before I have arrested you as a mischievous rebel and traitor," he cried.

Lydcott greeted the words with a mocking laugh.

"Produce your warrant!" he demanded derisively.

Something in his laugh and the tone of his voice—something in the cunning leer of his narrow dark eyes, and the way in which he fingered the trigger of his pistol—caused Lancelot to look at him with yet closer scrutiny.

"It seems to me," he said pointedly, "that this is not the first time that you and I have met, Master Lydcott—if that indeed be your name. I am greatly mistaken if we did not meet upon the field of Naseby."

"Upon which happy occasion," sneered Lydcott, "I had the pleasure of putting a bullet into your arm. Let me warn you, Master Carteret, that the next time I fire upon you 'twill be at a more vital spot."

The patter of horse's hoofs fell upon Lancelot's ear, and amid the welcome sound he heard Jack Merry's boyish voice calling his name. With a sudden move he urged his charger forward.

The obedient animal leapt across the sledge, alighting at Lydcott's side. Lancelot then seized the man by the back of the neck and tried to drag



him from his saddle. They struggled for a while, but Lydcott broke free and, drawing his pistol, fired.

When, a few moments afterwards, Cornet Jack Merry rode up, followed by the troopers, Lydcott was seen galloping away in hot haste, while Lancelot de Carteret lay very still upon the blood-stained grass, with his legs imprisoned under the weight of his fallen horse.

Cornet Merry leapt from his saddle and ran to his side. Going down on his knees, he put his hand beneath Lancelot's head, raising it gently.

"I fear he is badly hurt," he said to a corporal, who had also dismounted. "We had better have returned sooner."

Lancelot opened his eyes.

"Nay, 'tis the horse, 'tis the horse," he murmured. "Look to him, Sicklesmith, I am not hurt to speak of; but I cannot withdraw my legs from beneath him, lest I give him pain."

Corporal Sicklesmith tried to make the horse rise, but the faithful animal made no movement, and he saw that it was dead. Dead, with a bullet through the heart.

"Didst see into the fellow's face while you confronted him?" asked Merry, when presently he was helping Lancelot to mount upon a spare charger.

Lancelot looked at him curiously, almost doubtfully.

"Ay, that did I," he nodded. "Why do you ask?"

"Well?" pursued Merry, not heeding the question. "Didst know him? Or were my secret conjectures wrong, I wonder?"

"I know not what your conjectures may have

been," returned De Carteret, "but whether they were wrong or right, of this I am certain, that—disguised though he is by his cropped head and shaven face and Puritan attire—this Lydcott is none other than the outlawed traitor, Colonel Andros Aylmer!"

## CHAPTER XII

### QUARTERDECK CONFIDENCES

"How do you do, Mademoiselle? You are well, I hope?"

Ruth Aylmer sat in a low, cushioned chair on the privileged weather side of the quarterdeck, shielded from the wind by a screen of canvas. There was a bunch of purple grapes in her lap, but she was not eating. She raised her eyes to Captain de Carteret, who had paused in front of her, and stood now looking upon the fluttering tendrils of her sunlit hair.

"Oh, yes, indeed," she answered, speaking, as he had spoken, in the Jersey French, which was their common tongue. "You are so very good to me. How could I be otherwise than well and comfortable, when you treat me with such consideration?"

He smiled back at her and, bending, took up one of the grapes.

"I was thinking that perhaps the movement of the ship might be disagreeable to you," he said. "Believe me, if for your sake I could still the waves, I would."

"But indeed, I enjoy it," she responded simply. "And the waves are beautiful to look upon. They are so deeply blue."

He gazed at her admiringly, though not seeming to be looking at her.

"Not nearly so deeply blue and beautiful as are your eyes," he murmured softly.

Her cheeks and forehead slowly reddened. No one had ever paid her such a pretty compliment before. She turned and looked aft across the rail to where two ships sailed afar off, one pursuing the other. Were her eyes really as blue as the sea she wondered. His presence embarrassed her, and yet she would not for the world that he should leave her side.

"Wherefore are you leaving Captain Bowden's frigate so far behind you?" she questioned absently. "And, I pray you, why is he chasing the other ship?"

"The other ship is an enemy," he told her, "and Bowden is about to capture her, as I have no doubt he can very well do, without our help. As for my reason for leaving him behind—well, you see, Mademoiselle, on hearing the important news which you gave me an hour ago at breakfast, I decided to alter my course."

"Then you intend not to rescue my brother Martin?" she asked in a tone of regret, still regarding the distant ships.

He shook his head.

"Your brother may safely be left to the care of Christopher Bowden," he assured her.

"But," pursued Ruth uneasily, glancing round at the expanse of blue, "I see that you are going away from the land as well as from the frigate. You are sailing into the open sea!"

He smiled at her childlike ignorance of the sea's conditions.

"The land which we are leaving in our wake is the coast of Normandy," he explained. "Would you have me put you ashore in France? In an hour

from now, if I mistake not, you will see the fair island of Jersey looming ahead of us, towards which we are now sailing as swiftly as the wind will take us."

She looked up at him gratefully, and he saw the gladness in her eyes.

"Then I shall be back in Jersey to-night!" she cried, clasping her hands on her knees. "Oh, now that you tell me of this, I am indeed happy!"

He moved back a step

"Happy at the prospect of leaving me?" he breathed. "Sure, your happiness will be greater than mine at the separation! For me, I shall be very sad when you are no longer upon my ship; she will be empty when you are gone. Had I my wish, you should voyage with me to the last end of the world."

"Sad?" she echoed wonderingly, not understanding. "But you forget," she rejoined, "I shall be going home to Beau Desert, where they have missed me since yesternight, not knowing where I am."

He flung a grape-skin over the rail into the surging sea, and she saw his brows contract. There was a strange, set look about his face.

"And has your life at Beau Desert been so very joyous that you crave to return to it so impatiently?" he asked in a slow, level voice. "I should have supposed that you, who are so loyal to the King, would have but little inducement to go back into the kennel of such a rebel cur as Andros Aylmer."

Ruth crisped her hands in quick resentment. The words seemed unkind, and unworthy of so gentle a man as George de Carteret.

"Andros Aylmer is no longer at Beau Desert, but in England," she calmly retorted. "And, if you please, he is no rebel."



Captain de Carteret glanced up at the spreading sails above his head, and then went nearer to her.

"Pardon me if I contradict you, Mademoiselle," he said, looking full into her face and speaking very deliberately. "But although perhaps he is not at present residing at Beau Desert Farm, yet he is certainly in Jersey, and has been back in the island for many weeks. And let me inform you, since you appear still to be doubtful of the fact, that he is not only himself a rebel, but also a leader of rebels and a mischievous misleader of our faithful islanders."

Ruth shrank back in her chair, amazed at the information which she could no longer doubt, since it was conveyed to her by one whose honour and truthfulness she knew to be beyond all question.

"How do you know all this, Captain de Carteret?" she demanded to be told, breathing deeply.

He seated himself on the mounting of a great brass gun beside her.

"Is't possible that you have never so much as suspected him?" he responded. "Is't possible that you have never once seen him, masquerading in the Puritan disguise in which he goes about the island?"

Ruth shook her head and looked at him blankly.

"Surely you cannot have failed to see and recognise the man who is known in Jersey by the name of Major Lydcott?" he pursued.

"Major Lydcott?" Ruth repeated the name in a mazed, uncomprehending tone, as if for her it had no especial significance. "To be sure I have seen him—at a distance. But, I pray you, what has he to do with Colonel Aylmer?"

George de Carteret drew back with a sigh of relief.

"Ah," he nodded, "'tis clear—I see by your

candid eyes—that you do not know, that you have never even guessed. 'Tis not surprising to me that you should have been kept in ignorance of his subtle villainy. But 'tis none the less true, and I tell you here and now, that this Lydcott and Aylmer are one and the same person, and that even at this present time, his Majesty has issued a warrant for the man's arrest and imprisonment as a traitor."

He paused, watching the change that came into her face.

"Little wonder is it," he went on gently, "that when you boarded us yesternight I conjectured in my ignorance that you, too—even you, whom I have known since you were a little child—might have forsaken your duty to your sovereign."

Ruth covered her face with her hands.

"Alas," she cried, "that you should ever have had cause to doubt me! How can I assure you that I am innocent of all knowledge of these things? Truly, I did not dream that he was not still in England, fighting bravely for the King!"

"You have not been singular in such a belief," he said, leaning forward. "But did I not say, scarcely an hour ago, that I would trust you to the end?" he reminded her, laying his hand caressingly upon her silky golden hair. "I beg you not to distress yourself, dear Ruth; for I implicitly believe in your innocence and faithful loyalty."

She raised her head and looked at him in tearful gratitude for his confidence.

"But tell me," she faltered, "what of my mother—of Madame Aylmer? And what, too, of Martin? Have they also been cozened and blinded, as I have been?"

"I know not," returned Captain George, clasping his knee in his two hands. "Yet do I suspect that

Madame Aylmer at the least has not been kept in ignorance. For 'tis well known that her husband has more than once visited her in secret during these past weeks. As for Martin——"

He broke off, waiting while his sailing master passed aft along the lee side of the deck.

"As to your brother," he resumed, "—who, after all, is only your brother in name—I prefer to say no further than this : that, since 'twas he who induced you to display the false and misleading signals to our shallops, I can hardly believe that he is so free from guile as you are yourself."

"How I have been deceived !" Ruth sighed, and resting her chin upon her open hand, with her elbow on the arm of her chair, she stared dreamily outward upon the far-stretching horizon.

Captain de Carteret rose slowly to his feet and strolled aft to the binnacle. He gave some instructions to his sailing master and then returned and leaned with his folded arms upon the bulwark rail at Ruth's side.

"And knowing these things," he asked her quietly, "are you still minded to go back to your former life at Beau Desert? Or would you not prefer that I take you ashore and place you in my mother's care at Mont Orgueil Castle?"

Ruth looked at him in amazement for a moment and then shook her head.

"'Tis not for a poor peasant maid like me to take refuge in Mont Orgueil," was her decisive reply. "And can you think that I would abandon my own people, to whom I owe so much? No, no, Captain George; my duty is at Beau Desert, where it has ever been."

He drummed the tips of his fingers upon the rail.

"Ruth," he said, "they are not, and you know

that they are not, your own people. And you owe them no manner of duty. Have they ever treated you as a daughter? Have they not made you toil for them like a very hireling, ever since you were old enough to do woman's work?" He paused for a moment, and then went on, speaking with an emotion which he did not pretend to hide: "Many's the time that my heart has been full of pity for you, seeing you labouring upon the farm, driving the cattle afield, tending the poultry, or upon your knees scrubbing at floors! 'Tis not right that a maid of your refinement should do work like that. My faith! had I my way, you never again should enter their doors!"

"Pardon, Captain George," Ruth protested, with a dignified lift of her bare head, "but whatever be my failings, I trust that ingratitude is not one of them. And whatever their treatment of me, Andros and Lilette Aylmer are still the only father and mother that I have known!"

"That may indeed be true," he acknowledged, lapsing into silence. Then after a long interval, during which he leaned with his head in his hands, meditatively watching the waves as they curled off from the ship's side, he turned and looked down upon her crown of golden hair, saying very tenderly, as if speaking to himself:

"Such flower-like beauty as yours can never have sprung from any but a well-favoured root. Tell me, Ruth, have you no recollection whatsoever of those who loved and tended you in earliest childhood, before you came, like a blessing from Heaven, to Jersey?"

She drew a deep sigh, and idly plucked at the grapes upon her lap.

"None," she answered sadly. "None," she repeated. And, glancing upward, she added; "'Tis

strange that you should ask. For even on this very morning, whilst I was combing my hair in the state-room where I had slept, I was trying to remember. I know not why it should have been ; but it seemed to me, as I wantonly regarded my reflection in the bright mirror, that I caught a look in my eyes which belonged to other eyes than my own—eyes that I had seen long, long ago. And I wondered and wondered whose those other eyes could have been.”

“And yet,” meditated Captain de Carteret, “you were already more than a mere infant at the time of the wreck of *The Rainbow* in Grouville Bay, and must then have had clear enough remembrance of your early home in England.”

“I know not for certain even that it was in England,” Ruth demurred. “And ’tis strange that none of the shipmen who were saved knew of my being on board the frigate.”

“Less strange than you suppose,” suggested her companion ; “for the ship was but two days out from Plymouth, and it may well have been that during that brief while you were ill in the cabin, the weather being foul. Yet when I found you on the beach, it did not seem that you had been snatched from your cot, for you were fully clothed.”

Ruth stared at him in astonishment.

“*You* found me on the beach?” she cried. “*You?*”

He nodded.

“Ay, truly,” he answered, again seating himself on the gun-carriage in front of her. “’Twas I who rescued you from the waves, swimming out to you as you floated shoreward upon a grating. But ’twas Andros Aylmer who claimed you and carried you off to his farm, hoping to gain a reward for restoring you to your people, if they could be found,”



Ruth was silent for a while. With every moment it seemed to her that George de Carteret was entering closer and closer into her intimacy.

"Had my people themselves made inquiry, they must surely have found me," she regretted. "But it may be that they were but poor and obscure seafaring folk, who had no wish to find me—unless it be, as I have often believed, that my father and mother were both drowned at the time of the wreck."

Captain de Carteret took her unresisting hand and fondled it in his own strong hands.

"I will warrant that they did all that they could, if they were still alive," he said. "For no parents, even the humblest and poorest, can afford to lose a child whom they love, as I am well sure that yours loved you." He paused, restoring her hand to her lap.

"And since they failed, I can but believe that they are dead," Ruth rejoined, leaning back and clasping her fingers behind her neck.

"You have heard the story of the mother who climbed the mountain precipice to recover her child, stolen by an eagle," he reminded her. "'Tis so with all parents, all the world over. Well do I mind when I was but a stripling, starting upon my first voyage to the Mediterranean Sea. We were lying in London Pool, and there came on board a certain nobleman—the Earl of Eddington, who has since become so famous for his vast wealth. He was in sore and unconsolable grief over the loss of his child, who had been cruelly stolen from him; and he implored Captain Mabie to make search for the girl in Algiers and Tunis, and wherever else we landed on the Barbary coasts. For it seemed that on a summer's day when the children were at play with their nurse upon the sea shore, there came a band of

Barbary corsairs, who fell upon them. The eldest of the children, his lordship's heir, bravely gave up his life in defending his sister ; but the little Lady Marjorie—such was her name, if I remember aright—was seized and carried off by the Moors to their galley, waiting hidden behind the headland, and taken to Algiers, there to be sold into slavery ; while the nurse, escaping with a yet younger baby, ran in affright to the house among the trees to summon help. But too late ; for the robbers were already under sail, and no pursuit was possible."

Ruth caught the tone of sadness in his voice, and her eyes met his in sympathy.

"How pitiful !" she sighed. "Oh, how pitiful ! And pray, how fortunèd you in your searching ? For I am very sure that you did not neglect the poor Earl's entreaty that you should find the child, and take her back to him."

Captain de Carteret took two or three grapes from her lap.

"Much came of it," he answered, breaking one of the grapes between his teeth. "For, remembering the Earl's great sorrow, and knowing that other parents than he were in a similar case, on each and every occasion when I have voyaged to the Barbary coasts, whether to Algiers or Tunis or any other pirate stronghold, never have I failed to liberate some poor Christian prisoners and captives, both girls and boys, and even grown men and women ; ever hoping, yet hoping in vain, that the one which I especially sought might be of the number. Ah !——"

He broke off, looking aloft to the towering spread of canvas. He rose and went forward to the break of the quarterdeck, and, calling to one of his officers, ordered him to make some change in the set of the sails. Then, picking up his spyglass from the top

of the cabin skylight, he railed it to his eye and held it so for a long time, directed to a particular point on the far blue line of the horizon.

Ruth considered him exceedingly handsome as he stood there, a tall and lithe young figure on the mid-deck, keeping his balance so easily and securely as the ship heaved and pitched on the waves.

Presently, he lowered his glass and returned to her side.

"I see that her ladyship is displaying the Royal Standard from Mont Orgueil Castle," he said, resuming the dignified, authoritative demeanour of a naval officer. "'Tis surely indiscreet. As well might she cry it from the housetops that she is harbouring a royal visitor within her gates!"

Ruth rose to her feet, eager to get a sight of Jersey. But sharp though her eyes were, she could discern no sign of the island, and it was not until another hour had passed that she could distinguish the green uplands and recognise the various towers of the castle.

By that time, the booming of heavy guns had reached the ship. Captain de Carteret had crammed on more sail, but although he exercised all his great seamanship, and saw to it that not a breath of wind was wasted, yet long before he had dropped his anchor off Little Portelet Cove the fighting was at an end and the soldiery had returned within the fortress with their prisoners and their spoil.

He sent Ruth Aylmer ashore under the care of Lieutenant Le Pellay. As they approached the Guillelots Reef, Ruth was surprised to observe Isaac Wincall waiting on the rocks. He looked far less forbidding now in the broad daylight than in the darkness. His eyes were so searchingly centred upon her that she paid no regard to his lack of ears. He caught at the rope which was flung to him from the

boat's bow, and Ruth did not disdain to accept the help of his hand that he offered for her support as she stepped ashore.

"God be with me!" he muttered to himself mysteriously as he watched her walking unattended up the slope of the beach. "'Tis queer—mortal queer! Who is she? Where upon earth have I seen that maid before?"

## CHAPTER XIII

### HER LADYSHIP'S CURTSEY

PERROTINE DE CARTERET had seen and recognised *The Eagle* speeding under full sail towards the land, and every now and then, in the midst of her work of tending the wounded, she had gone to one of the seaward windows to discover how much nearer the vessel had approached. Perrotine was heartily thankful at her brother's unexpected return, little though she understood its reason ; for with Captain George here to take control over the embarrassing situation, all her own anxieties and responsibilities would be removed.

Those anxieties had been multiplied a thousand-fold by the circumstance that the Prince, who was the sole cause of them, had recklessly gone out with the cavaliers to take active part in the sortie against the enemy. Her fear lest he should come to some serious harm was terrible to endure. More than once, while she listened to the rattle of musket fire that came to her from beyond the trenches, she had felt impelled to go up to her mother and frankly tell her ladyship that the youth whom she believed to be a mere unimportant cornet of Dragoons was in reality no less a person than His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales. At one moment, when the fighting was at its height, she even thought of herself mounting upon horseback and riding forth to the front to find the



Prince and implore him to return into the safety of the castle. Then the sight of the Roundheads flying in panic retreat before the pursuing cavalry had calmed her terrors, and she had waited in silence ; and at length her fears had been allayed when, watching from the barbican, she had seen the cavaliers riding back victorious, with the Prince in their midst, obviously unharmed.

When they had straggled in across the drawbridge in careless disorder with their prisoners and their captured ammunitions, including Lydcott's barrel of gunpowder, Perrotine learned that three of their number had been killed, and that many were more or less seriously hurt. Captain Legge had received a sprain in the wrist, and an ugly wound across the cheek, and Lancelot de Carteret had suffered some injury by a fall from his charger.

These two officers were taken into the great hall to be attended to by Lady de Carteret. Their wounds had been dressed and all again had become quiet in and about the castle. Perrotine was nursing them when, on going to the window, she discovered that the ship had already dropped anchor and lowered her sails. A small boat was being pulled out to her. It was the boat in which, unknown to Perrotine, Ruth Aylmer had been taken ashore. At the same time, a larger boat—the captain's barge—was being brought inward to the castle sally-port, with George de Carteret seated in her stern sheets.

Perrotine decided to go down to the water-gate to meet her brother and prepare him for the surprise of finding that the Prince, whom he had left in Elizabeth Castle, had, for greater safety, taken up his residence at Mont Orgueil, disguised as an ordinary subaltern under an assumed name. She wished to warn Captain George against the danger of betraying

his recognition of the Prince. But her mother had bidden her not leave the two patients unattended, and she dared not quit the room until Lady de Carteret should give her permission.

When Lady de Carteret returned, she brought with her some food which she had been preparing.

"Take you the dish in your hand and serve Captain Legge, spoonful by spoonful," her ladyship instructed Perrotine, thus detaining her longer.

She herself went over to one of the windows and looked out upon the courtyard. She did not observe that Cornet Merry had followed her into the room and was now standing beside the couch upon which Lancelot lay.

"*Certes!*" she exclaimed at sight of Captain George approaching from the gate. "George has given uncommon attention to his personal appearance to-day! I usually object that when he comes ashore to see me he is rigged out like a very foretopman, reeking of tarpaulins. But, as I live, he's now attired in all the magnificence of a courtier! Why this foppishness, I wonder? Sure the boy has not fallen in love!"

He entered unannounced, followed by his page, and a shaft of sunlight fell upon him as he paused for a moment on the threshold. His body armour of polished steel and brass was only partly covered by his splendid cape of rich blue velvet and his sash of lighter blue silk. He had removed his helmet with its beautiful plumes of blue and snow white ostrich feathers, and now he gave it into the care of his page.

"Let no one enter, Hubert," he said to the boy who had closed the door behind him.

He glanced swiftly round the occupants of the spacious hall, as if to make certain that no stranger was present. Lady de Carteret advanced to meet

him, with outstretched hands ready for an embrace ; but he merely smiled to her in greeting, and passed on, and her ladyship's surprise at his seeming neglect of her was turned to blank astonishment when she saw him stride towards Jack Merry, pause respectfully in front of him and actually—actually—go down upon one knee in humble obeisance, bowing his head to press his lips upon the young fellow's proffered hand !

"Send I may live !" she gasped in utter amazement. "What do I see ?"

"Body o' me !" exclaimed Lancelot, watching from the rear. "This is interesting."

"*Tiens !*" ejaculated Captain Legge, with his hand at his bandaged cheek.

Perrotine only smiled, enjoying the dramatic situation.

George de Carteret rose gracefully to his feet and looked from the Prince to her ladyship and back to the Prince, who was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Art thou playing some boyish jest upon me, sir ?" he asked, himself somewhat amused. "It seemeth that Your Royal Highness hath discovered cause for merriment."

"Why, yes," returned the Prince, giving him a playful slap with his open hand upon the polished back of his cuirass. "Sure, 'twould make the soberest Puritan laugh to see how thou didst let the cat out of the bag just then. Nay," he urged, "see to her Ladyship, thou simpleton ; and stand not there abashed like a very schoolboy caught in his delinquency."

"Royal Highness ?" Lady de Carteret had clasped her trembling fingers to her temples in sheer bewilderment. "*Royal Highness ?*" she repeated in consternation. "Will no one explain ?"

Her sailor son went up to her then and embraced her tenderly.

"I perceive that you have been kept in the dark concerning our distinguished guest," he smiled ; and taking her hand, he conducted her forward. "Let me repair the omission by presenting you to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales."

Recovering some of her wonted composure, Lady de Carteret nipped up the sides of her skirts and made a profound and courtly curtsy.

"Sir, I am covered with confusion," she stammered. "Pray, how will Your Royal Highness ever deign to forgive me for my neglect? Sure, I can never forgive it to myself?"

"Madame," he answered, very graciously taking her hand and raising it to his lips. "Believe me, there is nothing to forgive."

"Oh, sir," she faltered ; "but have I not shamefully treated Your Royal Highness as a very lackey—dismissing you to the rude quarters of a common soldier instead of placing the best that could be procured at your command? Alack! Alack! Why did I not know? Why did I not guess? Why was I not told?"

"And I, too," interposed Lancelot, limping forward and meekly bending his head. "I, too, have unwittingly heaped insults and contempt upon Your Royal Highness, for which I deserve not to be pardoned so long as I live."

"Nay, nay, my good friends," protested the Prince, "I pray you to cease your complaints and regard me still as plain Jack Merry, cornet of Dragoons. For I assure you 'tis safer that I remain incognito." He looked at Captain George. "Am I not right, De Carteret?" he questioned.

"Of a certainty, sir," returned the captain. "'Twere better, indeed, that none beyond the company here gathered should be allowed even to

guess that Your Highness is in Jersey. I can but hope and trust that the precious secret has not already been allowed to leak out, as I feared it must have done when from across the sea I discovered the Royal standard flaunted from the tower."

He glanced in gentle reproof at Lady de Carteret as he spoke. Perrotine, listening to every word, marvelled greatly how her brother could possibly have learned the secret of the Prince's presence in Mont Orgueil, whilst he himself was still upon the sea, where no messenger could reach him. Yet it was clear to her that he must have learned it by some mysterious means ; else would he not have hastened home or come ashore, dressed for the occasion of an unexpected meeting with His Highness.

" 'Twas I myself who displayed the standard, never dreaming of its dangerous appropriateness," explained her ladyship. "How could the secret have leaked out when it was known to none but Perrotine, who I must say has kept it so well that she deceived even me with her prattle about her Cornet of Dragoons and who made no remonstrance, as she should have done, even when, in my ignorance of his identity, I permitted His Highness to risk his life in riding out against the rebels? "

George de Carteret then interrogated his mother, as well as Lancelot and Captain Legge, concerning the circumstances of the recent sortie ; and piece by piece, incident by incident, he gathered the whole story, making neither comment nor question until all had been told.

" 'Twas sheer folly in you, Lancelot," he said to his brother, "to attempt without help to arrest a man like Lydcott. Surely you understood that he was more important than all the riff-raff that your company followed ! 'Twas bad tactics, sir, abomin-



ably bad ! And by your folly you not only endangered your own life and a life more precious than yours, but lost a valuable prisoner, who, for aught you know, may even already have escaped from Jersey. For I warrant me you have not had the precaution to avert his flight."

He turned questioning eyes to the Prince.

"I trust, sir," he said, "that this rascal Lydcott, or Aylmer, was allowed no opportunity of seeing Your Highness at close quarters? For if he has recognised you, I will not answer for your safety while he is still at large. 'Twas most dangerous, sir, your riding out as you did."

"Nay, I'll be sworn he knew me not," the Prince assured him.

"Nevertheless," pursued De Carteret, "the man must be apprehended at the earliest possible moment. Indeed, I will myself go in search of him before I return on board my ship."

"You'll remain and perform the honours of the table?" interposed Lady de Carteret, anxious that her royal guest, now that he was known to her, should be entertained with all the splendour of hospitality due to his exalted station.

"Tut, mother," objected George, "I beseech you to understand that there must be no display of ceremony. Remember that our guest is a refugee, entrusted to your safe guardianship, and that to bring out your gold plate and such like fallals were but to advertise his presence to the servants and the garrison!"

Lady de Carteret met his glance with a look of injured pride.

"But, good gracious," she protested, "I cannot neglect my loyal duty ! And I would have you know that my servants are not a pack of contemptible spies, and that the garrison can be trusted to a man"

The Prince himself then spoke :

"Your Ladyship will, of course, remember that David and James Bandinel are now prisoners within your gates," he reminded her ; "and that, being well trained in all the subtle arts of conspiracy and intrigue, they are capable of transmitting messages to their friends outside, even through the thick walls of Mont Orgueil Castle."

"Cunning as vixen foxes, the pair of them !" agreed George de Carteret. And turning to Captain Legge, he inquired : "In what part of the castle are your captives imprisoned ? They are safely secured against escape, I hope ?"

"So please you, sir," the officer replied, nervously overawed by the presence of royalty, "they are at the moment confined within the uppermost cells of the Harliston Tower, with armed sentinels posted without the barred door."

"Good," nodded De Carteret. "'Tis a safe enough harbourage, I grant you ; if the rascals enlist not the services of the bats and owls to complete their conspiracies. But myself, I'd have clapped them into the deepest dungeons, to keep company with the vermin rats. Doubtless 'tis intended, however, to reserve the dungeons for the reception of Lydcott and his fellow traitors, Dumaresq and Bisson."

He strode to and fro restlessly.

"'Tis a pity that you are disabled, Master Legge," he resumed, "and you, also, brother Lancelot. Else I might have enlisted your help to lay Lydcott by the heels ; for I shall need a companion or two this evening."

The Prince moved nearer to him, saluted deferentially, and stood at attention.

"If I might offer myself as a substitute in the adventure," he modestly suggested, "I am willing ;

and I doubt not that you can depend upon my loyalty."

Captain de Carteret regarded him sternly for a moment or two, as if he were contemplating the possibility, and then answered decisively.

"No, Master Merry. I must e'en reject the offer of such services. On the one hand, you are not here upon active duty; and on the other, I fear me, you are not well enough acquainted with the lie of the land to be of great help in running our quarry to earth. Moreover, you have had your fill of midnight adventure for a while." He laid his hand fondly upon Perrotine's shoulder; "I have even a notion that I will take my sister in preference," he said, drawing her to him. "What say you, Perrotine? Wilt come, along with Debenham?"

"Right gladly," said she, glancing aside at her brother's pretty, aristocratic-looking page, who still stood demurely upon guard at the door. "I will go to take care of my Lord Debenham, lest he get lost; for you seem to ignore that his lordship is even less familiar with our lanes and byeways than is Master Merry himself."

"That is true," acknowledged her brother, signing to the boy to draw near him. "But, as you shall see, I have my particular reasons for taking Hubert; and I will ask you to trick him out in the poorest and shabbiest disguise that you can find for him, to the end that he may be taken for a homeless wanderer."

Young Lord Debenham, relieved from his sentry duty, strode boldly forward and shook hands with the Prince.

"You will be better cared for here, sir, than at the other castle," he familiarly remarked. "But for comfort and good living, give me the Captain's cabin

aboard *The Eagle!*" He paused a moment and then added: "And so your name is again changed, eh? Well, 'twas a merry thought that invented it."

"Marry!" returned the Prince. "I shall soon have as many aliases as any cutpurse highwayman!" He drew back a step and looked the boy up and down from head to foot. "Your costume pleases me, Debenham," he remarked approvingly. "If't had not been De Carteret's own livery, faith, I'd have sworn that you had chosen the azure velvet with the foppish intent to suit the colour of your eyes! Bewary of over much decoration, Hubert. 'Tis unseemly in these sober Puritan days."

"Yes, sir," the boy smiled roguishly, as he drew away. "In future, so please you, I will leave it to Your Royal Highness to decorate me."

The Prince laughed gaily at the quip.

"In sooth, I will do so, when you deserve it," he rejoined.

Hubert retired bowing, and turned toward his hostess. Lady de Carteret met him and engaged him for a few moments in conversation, presently excusing herself on the plea of her anxiety to superintend her servants in providing for her royal guest.

Half an hour afterwards, a Parliamentary spy, stationed among the rocks in sight of the sally-port, saw Captain George de Carteret enter his barge and return to his ship. The anchor was weighed, the sails were unfurled, and the spy hastened away to inform his rebel masters that all danger from the dreaded George de Carteret was past. As the vessel's sails filled, however, and she began to move, a small boat with a single occupant was pulled shoreward. The rower had all the appearance of being an elderly, weatherworn seaman, but had the Roundhead spy been there to see him leap ashore, he would have

observed that he was not so old as he looked, and had he watched him walking up to the castle water-gate he might further have discovered that he was none other than Captain George de Carteret himself.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE TRUANT'S RETURN

LIEUTENANT LE PELIAY had offered to accompany Ruth to the safety of her home ; but the gun-firing which they had heard from the ship had ceased, the fighting was at an end, the island had resumed its wonted quietude, and, assuring him that no possible harm could come to her, Ruth had insisted upon his returning with the boat and leaving her to make her way alone.

She had ascended the cliff path very quickly, anxious to hasten to her neglected duties on the farm, only going aside for a moment to find the stable lantern which she had left lying in the place whence she had flashed her useless signals ; and then she had climbed upward to the level ground beside the wind-mill. There she paused and looked back regretfully at the ship, then lying at anchor, and watched the nimble seamen furling the sails and squaring the yards. She felt a greater fondness for the majestic vessel than she had thought she could ever feel for any ship. The hours which she had spent on board had been truly the happiest of all her life ; they had passed like a beautiful dream, and George de Carteret had treated her with more gentle kindness than she could remember anyone to have bestowed upon her ever before. Why had he been so good to her ? His

voice had been like music to her ears, his glance into her eyes had been as a blessing, the touch of his hand upon her hair had been a caress. To her he had seemed like a very prince of goodness and tenderness. Why had he been so kind ?

She wondered then at her eagerness to leave the ship—wondered how she could have fretted, as she had done, to be back on land, when in her heart of hearts she would have been willing to sail with him, as he had expressed it, to the uttermost ends of the world. When she had stepped ashore, she had gone hurriedly across the rocks and up the slope of the cliff, wishing to get home without a moment's delay ; but now with strange suddenness the prospect of returning to the dull, monotonous life of the farm was as darkness unto light, as thralldom unto liberty ; and it was with a pang of dreadful sadness that she turned from the sea and continued her way in the direction of Beau Desert. To her it was now a desert that was in no sense beautiful.

From the high land behind Gorey village, she saw some of the soldiers of the garrison levelling the trenches, gathering the wreckage of the rebel's belongings, and otherwise clearing away the remnants of the Roundhead encampment ; and she judged by these signs that the late conflict had ended in favour of the cavaliers who had defended the Royal Standard which still floated bravely from the proud tower of the castle.

And then the disturbing thought came to her : if Colonel Aylmer had taken part in the fight, and if he had returned defeated to Beau Desert, how should she dare to meet him ? How should she, who had never for an instant swerved from her loyalty to King Charles, be bold enough to confront him who was now openly declared to be one of the most ardent and

dangerous of the King's enemies? She knew by long experience how cruel and vindictive Andros Aylmer could be toward those who displeased him or sought to thwart his iron will. If he should by chance have learned that she had helped Sir Philip de Carteret's daughter, what would be his attitude toward her? Ruth did not believe it possible that he could yet have discovered that she had also been of service toward the Prince of Wales. George de Carteret had assured her that the secret of the Prince's presence in Jersey was secure. And, for her own part, she was resolved that even though Andros Aylmer should put her to the extreme of torture she would preserve her silence to the last dear breath of her young life.

Yet in her dire perplexity she realised that she was not skilled in the arts of deception and falsehood. Never yet had she stooped to tell a lie, even when a lie might have saved her from some painful punishment. She had, indeed, sometimes withheld the truth to save a companion from admonishment, and had herself endured the chastisement which was due to another; but such vicarious punishment had carried no lasting sting. Once Colonel Aylmer had thrashed her for the death of a calf, which he declared that she had wantonly killed; but she had received each cruel stroke with resignation, knowing that she was better able to bear it than the dumb and helpless dog whose guilt she was covering.

As she came within view of the homestead, embraced by its blossoming fruit trees, its windows reflecting the sunlight, the smoke curling blue from its chimneys, the sight seemed to beckon her onward to the scenes of her innocent childhood; but her feet became as heavy as lead, and she lingered for long by fresh, green hedgerows, where the primroses and wild violets

grew in abundance on the mossy banks, and the nesting birds were busy. And the nearer she approached, the greater was her reluctance to break the spell of her joy in the beautiful world and to face the storm of wrath which she knew she must presently meet.

In vain did she tell herself that, after all, Andros Aylmer might not be at home. Even his absence would not shield her from Madame Aylmer's sharp, venomous tongue and insistent demands for a full explanation of all that had happened, and of how she had dared to steal out of the house, and of why she had returned without Martin. Ruth dreaded the questions which would be put to her, and try how she might she could not prepare her equivocal answers.

For a long time she stood leaning over the gate of the pasture, with her chin resting on her clasped hands, thinking, thinking. And soon the cows gathered about her, swishing their tails against their fawn velvet sides and patiently staring at her with their large, soft eyes. One of them came close to her and pressed a cold, wet nose to her hand, breathing its sweet clover breath into the girl's face.

"Yes, yes, Priscilla," said Ruth, fondly stroking the cow's smooth muzzle, "but, 'tis not yet time for thee to go home. We will wait."

But it seemed that the herd knew the time of day better than she, for hardly had she spoken when from afar there came the chimes of Gorey church, telling her that it was later than she had thought. So she opened the wide gate and cried, "Coo-coo-coo!" and Priscilla led the long procession out into the lane, and Ruth followed at the rear.

At the entrance of the farmyard, she was met by Madame Aylmer and Guida, the dairymaid, who had been coming out to call the cattle home.

Madame Aylmer, standing still as a stone image, stared at the truant in blank silence for some moments.

"So you have returned to your duty at last!" she muttered, suppressing her anger. "And where have you left Martin?"

Ruth dropped a curtsy, well knowing that the omission of this outward sign of respect would be regarded as a most serious offence.

"Martin is out upon the sea," she answered calmly. "I know not when he may come back, for he has been taken prisoner in Christopher Bowden's ship."

"What?" cried Madame Aylmer in quick consternation. "Martin—my son—taken prisoner? And by Christopher Bowden?" Her eyes flashed in a rising fury of indignation. "Bowden?" she repeated, clenching her hands. Then she went a step nearer to Ruth, bending forward and fixing her searching stare full upon the girl's placid face. "I do not believe you," she stammered. "Christopher Bowden would do no such foolish thing. You are lying to me! Where is my son?"

Ruth's long, dark eyelashes were lowered.

"Sure, 'tis not the first time that Captain Bowden has made prisoner of a professed Royalist," was her meek reply. "But whether he be foolish or wise, Royalist or rebel, Martin is now upon his ship, far out upon the sea."

"Rebel, forsooth!" cried Madame Aylmer. "I know not what you mean. Who gave you leave to call any honest man a rebel, I'd like to hear? Get you from me, you brazen minx! Get you to the milking. And, when you are done, come you instantly within doors, that I may come to an understanding of your naughtiness!"

She glanced quickly toward the house. Ruth



followed her glance and saw a tall man move back, as though guiltily, from the opening of the kitchen door. She had caught but a fleeting glimpse of him as he disappeared—of his sombre black clothes and crumpled white collar, his gaunt, shaven face, and bare, close-cropped head—but that glimpse was enough for her.

“So he is here in his own home!” she said to herself afterward in the shuppen, seating herself upon a three-legged stool and pressing her forehead against Priscilla’s warm side. “Why is he afraid that I should see him?”

While she was still busy with the milking she found the dairymaid near her.

“Was father hurt in the fight to-day, Guida?” she inquired very casually. It was her habit to refer to Colonel Aylmer as “father.”

“Hurt? But no,” returned Guida. “How should he be—he who is the skilfullest swordsman in all Jersey? Not he, indeed. He came home as whole as he went forth; though not so merry, I allow; nor so confident, seeing the close escape he had from sharing the good Dean Bandinel’s new abode in the dungeons of Mont Orgueil.”

Ruth’s milkpail came near to upsetting as she gave a little start backward. David Bandinel arrested! She almost betrayed her satisfaction at the important news.

“And how fortunèd the other side?” she questioned, anxious to learn if her friends in the castle had met with any serious disaster. She dared not make a more direct inquiry. “I warrant that they are not scathless,” she added.

“Marry, I know not how they fared,” Guida replied. “Tony Sicklesmith sustained no injury, and that satisfies me; although, to be sure, I’d be sorry,

as any maid would, to learn that poor Master Lancelot's hurts are beyond recovery."

Ruth paused in her milking and looked up in alarm. Lancelot's hurts !

"Dost think that they may be?" she asked falteringly.

Guida moved round to the farther side of the brown cow against which she had been standing. The clatter of her wooden sabots on the stone floor almost drowned her voice as she answered :

"Well, 'tis true he was picked up for dead outside of Gearing's farm, where your father had fought him, and I fear me that Corporal Sicklesmith will lose a most generous master."

Ruth drew a deep breath. This was doleful news for Captain George de Carteret.

"Wast your Tony who picked him up, Guida?" she inquired, listening to the regular swish, swish of the milk into Guida's pail.

"You may warrant that Tony was not far away," the dairymaid paused to answer. "Tony it was, if you wish to know—Tony and a young stripling subaltern whose name I know not."

Ruth rose to her feet, taking up her stool and pail. She was wondering if that same subaltern could by any chance be Perrotine de Carteret's companion of the last night's adventure.

"'Tis strange that you know not the young gentleman's name," she remarked lightly, although her heart was heavy with anxiety lest it should turn out that the Prince had been permitted to take part in the fighting.

"Tut, how should I know the fellow's name?" responded Guida. "'Twas but yesternight that he came as a stranger from Elizabeth Castle, bringing the King's warrant which was the cause of all the

mischief to-day. I know no more of him than that. Hast milked Sophia? Upon my life, I do believe that every creature of them has been bewitched by the gun-firing to-day—unless 'tis your own mysterious absence that has caused them to fret themselves dry. Pray, are you going to tell me where you have been, Ruth? 'Twas whispered that you had eloped with one of the cavaliers from the castle; but y'are too discreet for that."

Ruth caught up two heavy pails of milk and forced herself to smile.

"Well, an' you'd know, Guida," she said in a winning tone of confidence, "a good fairy touched me with her magic wand, and turned me into a thistledown, and I floated away betwixt sea and sky, wafted upon a sunbeam, to the uttermost, uttermost end of the world; and there I sat me, with my feet swinging over the empty nothing, until the moon came so near unto me that I could e'en caress her jolly face."

"For the which impertinence, I vow she smacked you well," laughed Guida. "For I see that you are hopelessly moonstruck."

When the milk had been carried into the dairy and her work was finished, Ruth timidly entered the house by the kitchen door and halted in the passage, fearing to go farther. She heard Colonel Aylmer's gruff voice speaking her name.

"Had it been Ruth instead of Martin, I'd not have cared," he was saying. "Martin is of an age to understand these things, and has no such foolish fancies for kings and princes. But the girl is a danger to be guarded against, and 'twill not do that she should know that I am here."

"Then you must even hide, as before, in the Sea Wolf's Cave," came Madame Aylmer's voice.

"But I see not the danger. Prithee, what can the girl do? Dost imagine that she would dare to betray you?"

"Nay, I fear not her deliberate betrayal," resumed Aylmer. He coughed. Ruth knew his habitual cough. It was always more frequent when he was mentally agitated. "What I do fear," he went on, "is the child's inconvenient honesty. God forgive me for saying so, Lilette, but in bringing her up so carefully in the path of righteousness, you have made her a most dangerous teller of the truth. She is incapable of subterfuge; and if one of De Carteret's creatures should get hold of her our secrets will flow like water through a sieve."

There was a pause, and Ruth was about to proceed when Madame Aylmer again spoke.

"I marvel that you have not yet contrived to overpower and frustrate that weakling in Elizabeth Castle," she said in a low, insinuating voice. And Ruth could imagine the look of cunning which must have come into her eyes.

"Ah," returned her husband, "you know not of the plot that we have been hatching—David Bandinel and I. 'Tis a heavy blow to our plans that David has been entrapped; yet he has laid the train most skilfully, and ere another day be past"—he lowered his voice and Ruth strained her ears in vain to catch his words.

"What?" gasped Madame Aylmer. "Wouldst stoop to murder him—the King's own Governor?"

"Murder?" exclaimed Aylmer. "You are using an ugly word, Madame. We'll but remove him. And none shall know by whom or by what secret agency his death has been compassed."

Ruth moved, and by accident knocked against a brush, which fell to the floor.

"Hark!" whispered Lilette Aylmer. "'Tis Ruth. Quick. Into the pantry!"

Ruth boldly entered the room, in time to see the pantry door closed silently upon him. But she gave no sign of her knowledge.

"You are alone, then?" she remarked quietly, unconcernedly, as she crossed to the window.

Madame was breathing heavily and her hands were nervously clutching the arms of her chair, their grip so tight that her knuckles showed white under the strain. She glanced furtively toward the pantry door, which was still ajar to the space of an inch.

"Wherefore should I not be alone?" she asked.

Ruth rested a knee upon the window-seat and bent forward to adjust the folds of the dimity curtains.

"I had thought—when I entered the kitchen"—she faltered—"I had thought that I heard a man's voice. 'Twas father's voice." She turned slowly and added: "When did he return from England?"

Lilette Aylmer pushed back her chair noisily and rose to her feet, glaring at Ruth with ill-assumed astonishment.

"Child, what has come over you in your unexplained truancy?" she questioned, her lips pale with anger and the muscles of her cheeks twitching. "Have you gone stark, staring mad? There is no man here! And where no man is, how could there be a man's voice?"

She strode to the pantry, drew the door open a little further and looked within, pretending to search for an intruder, but in reality to assure herself that her husband was well concealed, then closed it again.

Did she perceive the look of contempt which came into Ruth's face as she advanced toward the girl? Perhaps so: and perhaps she felt that the contempt



was deserved ; for she stopped abruptly and gave an uneasy little laugh.

"How truly preposterous of you to imagine that Colonel Aylmer could possibly be here !" she sneered. "But I have observed of late that your common sense has gone strangely astray. And now," she demanded imperatively, "where have you been ? What is the meaning of your spending the night and the better part of the day away from your home, neglecting your work and causing me untold trouble and anxiety ? Give me a true account of your most shameful conduct !"

Ruth was silent.

"Do you hear ?" cried Madame Aylmer, seizing her by the arm and giving her a shake.

"'Tis surely known to you by now that we—Martin and I—went forth to show signals to the French shallops," began Ruth, stepping back, "for you must have missed the two lanterns from the stable."

"Well ?" pursued Madame. "'Tis true we missed the lanterns. And you showed the signals ?"

"Even as Martin devised," Ruth answered, "and as Major Lydcott intended, to the end, as it now seems, that the shallops should be led astray." She laid stress upon the name of Major Lydcott. "But," she added, "had I known then what I know now 'tis certain that I should not have gone."

Madame Aylmer looked at her curiously from under her bent brows.

"What do you know now that makes so much difference ?" she sternly inquired, restraining herself with evident effort.

Ruth raised her head proudly and met the woman's scrutiny without flinching.

"I now know that Martin deceived me," she

answered firmly. "I now know that, like the man who gave him his instructions, he was acting the part of a traitor to his king!"

"His king?" hissed Madame Aylmer, now throwing off all attempt at composure. "A truce to your babble of kings," she cried hotly. "When kings forget their duty, they are but puppets, whom 'tis folly to serve."

"Indeed?" rejoined Ruth in surprise, more at her foster-mother's vehemence than at her republican opinions. "And since when, may I ask, have you seen fit to depart from your former loyalty to his Majesty?"

She caught the sound of a suppressed cough from within the pantry. Madame Aylmer controlled her indignation at the stinging rebuke by biting her thin lips.

"You have not yet informed me where and how you have spent your time since midnight, when you ought to have been at home," she pursued.

"'Tis briefly told," returned Ruth. "Whilst we were still beside the sea, we were fallen upon and carried off as prisoners by Christopher Bowden and his boat's crew. We were taken for Royalists—how could I deny that I was one? And if I afterwards contrived to escape without Martin, who might also have done so, sure 'tis no fault of mine."

"Taken for Royalists?" repeated Madame Aylmer. "Ah, now I understand. Then 'tis to you, and you alone, that Martin owes his capture! 'Tis your mischievous, chattering tongue that has cost him his liberty! Go from me! Go up to your room—to your bed; and learn there the meaning of the loss of liberty. For, though you escaped from Christopher Bowden, you shall not escape from my prison so easily. Go, and at once!"

Ruth hesitated an instant and then dared to cross to the pantry and take hold of the door handle. Lilette Aylmer leapt toward her, and seizing her by the shoulder flung her backward against the table.

"What would you do there?" she cried. Her face was crimson with fury.

"You had not said that I should go without my supper," Ruth retorted, very calmly. "But if I may not help myself to food, at the least you will permit me to take my slippers."

"Impudent hussy!" yelled Lilette Aylmer, now beside herself with rage, and, swinging back her arm, she dealt Ruth a resounding smack across the cheek with her open hand.

Ruth staggered under the blow, but quickly recovered herself. Bearing the pain and the indignity with heroic fortitude, she turned slowly and obediently away. On the threshold she paused and looked back over her shoulder. She spoke no word; but Lilette Aylmer, seeing the scornful indignation that flashed from the girl's tearless eyes, knew that she had kindled a fire which would not soon be extinguished.

## CHAPTER XV

### DIVIDED DUTY

RUTH knew by experience the meaning of imprisonment in her room. It was her foster-mother's favourite method of inflicting punishment on the more glaring occasions of disobedience when mere blows did not suffice. In earlier years the condemned victim had often suffered the added indignity of being tied by stout ropes to the bedpost ; but this barbarian species of torture had been discontinued since Ruth had passed beyond the age of submissive childhood, and it was not a very serious or bodily hurtful form of incarceration which she was now sentenced to endure.

It was true that the supply of nourishing food would be withdrawn ; but to be reduced to a diet of bread and water was sometimes even to be preferred to a full meal at the family table in company with Lilette Aylmer. Ruth could usually count upon the period of detention under lock and key not lasting beyond a few hours ; since she knew that her able-bodied help in the work of the farm was of more vital consequence to her tyrant than the gloating satisfaction which Madame derived from imposing punishment upon the delinquent.

Her offence in the present instance, however, was far more gravely culpable than any which she had previously committed. To steal an apple, or

waste her candle, to be late in rising, or to be unduly hungry, to speak with impudence, or to break a plate, these were acts of mere naughtiness ; but the faults of which she was now guilty amounted to positive crime, and Ruth prepared herself for the physical restraint of ropes binding her to the bedpost, accompanied by a severe whipping, as well as being reduced to the customary bread and water.

Fully realising the enormity of her guilt as measured from Madame Aylmer's point of view, Ruth nevertheless condoned her own crime, and even felt glorified in its committal. Had she been commanded to do so, she would not have owned for an instant any contrition for what she had done. Had she been permitted to live over again the past four-and-twenty hours, she would have acted in every incident exactly as she had done, and in defiance of Madame Aylmer. Never in all her life had she felt so hotly defiant as she felt now, entering her little room with her cheek burning and painfully nipping from the savage blow that had been dealt her. Never before had she experienced such a determination to resist, and fight against the oppression which she had endured so meekly and so long, and which had culminated in the scene just enacted.

If Lilette Aylmer had followed her upstairs expecting to find a submissively penitent prisoner waiting ready to apologise, ready to receive an expected thrashing, and shrinking in sensitive fear from the sting of a venomous tongue, she would have been vastly amazed. Instead of a creature of weakness, cowed and suppliant, she would have found an antagonist roused to a dangerous degree of anger and ready to repel her with strength for strength, with blow for blow. Instead of a cringing child overwhelmed by terror, she would have been confronted



by the proudly challenging courage of a personality far more resolute, far more intrepid than her own.

But she did not follow.

Ruth listened for her coming, but only heard the cautious closing of a door, and then the murmur of voices engaged in discussion. After a while the voices ceased. The stairs creaked, stealthy footsteps sounded on the landing. Ruth waited, but no one entered her room. The door was already close shut, and now a key was thrust nervously into the lock and turned vindictively ; and again the stairs creaked.

With a sigh of relief at being left alone and unmolested Ruth turned to her bed and, sitting on its edge, took off her boots, remembering that the last time that she had laced them she had been on board George de Carteret's ship and in the luxurious cabin which had been so lately occupied by the Prince. She thought it only natural that the joy of that unique experience should be followed by a period of compensating misery. But the joy had nevertheless left a precious memory within her, which came to her like the unfading fragrance of the sweet woodruff and the vernal-grass, filling her being with unspeakable ecstasy ; and she felt that while that memory remained it would have power to soothe and satisfy her through all the misery that ever a maid could meet.

Her smitten cheek still pained her. It had been hard to bear ; but she had not wept. She had forced back her tears, and she was glad now that her eyes were dry. She did not want them to be marred by redness. George de Carteret had said that they were beautiful. "The sea is not nearly so deeply blue and beautiful as are your eyes," he had murmured

to her. She had not thought them beautiful before. She had never considered herself in that way.

But Captain de Carteret was not one to say what was untrue ; and he must surely know. He who was a friend of the King and had been to the King's Palace of St. James's and there seen the most famous beauties of the Royal Court—he must surely know whether or not she was comely, just as she herself knew that Priscilla was the most beautiful of all the cows in Jersey, and that the cultured lily was more beautiful than the wildings of the hedgerows.

She crossed the little room to the narrow, latticed window, and, drawing aside the muslin curtain, looked out upon the sunlit land. Far away to the north-east she could see the towers of Mont Orgueil Castle and the Royal Standard which was still flying ; and beyond, upon a tiny space of the sea that glistened between the trees, she saw Captain de Carteret's gallant ship sailing away. She drew back with a sigh.

Somehow she felt less safe, more lonely and desolate, now that Captain George was no longer near her ; for she did not doubt that he was on board his ship. She thought it strange that he should go so soon. It seemed to her now that his only purpose in coming back to the island must have been to put her ashore. She would much have preferred that he had continued his voyage, keeping her with him, now that she knew to what it was that she had come back.

Idly she picked up a comb from the rough wooden box which was her only dressing-table and began to comb her hair. All that she possessed in the form of mirror was a small piece of plain glass, which she stood up against the dark wall. It was hardly so large as the palm of her hand, but, by kneeling in

front of it, she could see a dim reflection of her features one by one as she moved to reveal them. It was only by difficult contrivance that she could see both of her eyes at the same time, and their colour was hardly discernible.

She found herself wondering whether Captain George would consider it right or not that her lashes should be so very long. Guida's eyelashes were quite short, but her own seemed almost as long as those of Priscilla, the beautiful cow. And they were dark, as were her eyebrows; very much darker than Guida's, although Guida's hair was brown. It could not surely be right, she considered, that while her hair, which she was now combing, was yellow as a golden guinea, her brows and lashes should be nearly black; and she decided that George de Carteret had perhaps referred only to the eyes themselves, and not to their immediate surroundings.

She had observed him looking at her lips while she spoke. Or at least she thought that it was her lips. But perhaps it was her teeth. She had never questioned whether her teeth were good or not, albeit Guida had once said to her that they were like a row of shining pearls. Ruth had never seen a row of pearls, although she had read about such things in her Bible, and knew that they were precious. She opened her red lips now before the piece of glass. Yes, her teeth were very even; not crumpled like Madame Aylmer's, or green like Guida's, but regular, like peas in a pod, and white—white as the milk that she had just left in the dairy. She had always washed them when she washed her face, having been told that people who did not do so were liable to the pains of toothache. But now she took a corner of her apron and polished them

until they really shone like the pearls to which Guida had compared them.

Suddenly she realised that in regarding herself as she was doing now, and as she had done in the ship's cabin, she was guilty of the terrible, unforgivable sin of personal vanity. All her face became as red as the marks of Madame Aylmer's fingers upon her cheek, and she put the glass aside and rose from her knees.

"No, no, no," she murmured reproachfully to herself, "'tis sinful to be vain, and I have naught to be vain of. Beauty and favour are not for me—for me, a worthless waif that was cast like a drifting weed upon the shore, to live upon charity and work for my daily bread—my daily bread," she reflected. And this led her to the thought of the forgiving of trespass.

Ought she not to forgive Madame Aylmer rather than to bear resentment against her? Ought she not, when she had been struck, to have turned the other cheek to be smitten also? Had Lilette Aylmer chosen at that moment to enter Ruth's room she would have met with no great opposition. Ruth was becoming gently submissive, and might even have borne a chastisement without active rebellion. But at the same time you must not suppose that any pains, however severe, or threats, however terrible, would have wrung from her a single word of confession or admission of penitence.

At the far end of the room, under the slope of the roof, there was a spacious cupboard, or loft, used sometimes as a storing place for wool. In the long winter nights of her younger girlhood, Ruth had been accustomed to imagine it as the abode of all manner of hobgoblins, dragons and mischievous sprites; and when the wind moaned wildly she had pretended that the dismal sound

was the roaring of hungry lions, or of some great and fearsome monster such as the one slain by Theseus in the story.

But afterwards, abandoning these fancies, she had kept all her little private treasures within its darkness ; and now she entered it without thought of fear, and cautiously opened the wooden shutter of an air hole under the eaves to peep out over the backyard and the green fields, to see if Guida had finished her work in the dairy and returned from taking the cattle back to the pastures. Through the narrow aperture she saw Guida coming homeward along the lane, swinging her sun-bonnet by its strings as if she were a cavalry soldier cutting a way through an enemy's ranks.

Ruth was about to close the shutter again when Andros and Lilette Aylmer crossed the yard together. Colonel Aylmer wore his long cloak and carried what looked like a parcel of food under his arm. At the gate they paused and spoke in whispers ; then he kissed his wife on the forehead and stole away, as if not wishing to be observed even by the hens and chickens which strutted about the farmyard. Ruth could not see which way he went after he had passed beyond the intervening cattle sheds, and she could only surmise that he had decided to go into hiding somewhere outside the boundaries of Beau Desert.

She went back into her room and sat for a long time beside her little window casement, until the sun dropped behind the trees and the sea lost its brightness. Very silently, lest Madame Aylmer should hear, she opened the casement to breathe the violet-scented air that came up to her from the garden. The space was just wide enough for her to lean out. By a very little effort she could have climbed bodily forth and, gaining a foothold on the roof of the still-room,



escaped by dropping to the ground or climbing down by the ivy as she had done many times before. But she did not think of escape. Even her imprisonment here under a reign of tyranny and oppression was better than destitution in a world where she had no other home.

While she leaned out, she was surprised to see a party of horsemen approaching along the main road. They were soldiers from Mont Orgueil Castle, as she knew by their morions and red coats. They halted within the ambush of a group of trees. Presently two of them emerged on foot and entered the Beau Desert orchard. One of them Ruth recognised as Corporal Sicklesmith—Guida Halkett's sweetheart. Was Tony daring to come and see Guida even now, in the light of day, leaving his fellow troopers to wait for him while he should pay court to her? If so, it was well for him that Colonel Aylmer was not here! Certainly he appeared to be coming for no open and ordinary purpose, for, instead of approaching by the usual path, he was seeking the most sheltered ways.

His companion was not dressed as a soldier, but looked like some poor seafarer. Ruth wondered why Sicklesmith should be thus accompanied. They disappeared, and for many minutes she neither saw nor heard anything more, until suddenly a movement among the deep shadows of the rhododendrons caught her eye, and she drew back from the casement. But only for a moment. When she looked out again something white was waving to and fro above a nearer bush, as though some one were signalling to her. She leaned forward, and, to her astonishment, discovered Perrotine de Carteret pressing forward over the bush, a white kerchief in her uplifted hand, beckoning to her as if inviting her to come out to her.

Ruth shook her head. Then Perrotine glanced back over her shoulder and seemed to be whispering to some one ; and presently the bushes were parted and a boy crept forth, treading very softly on the grass with his bare feet. He was dressed like a beggar boy, in a ragged coat that was too big for him and came down below his knees. His face was hidden under the wide brim of a tattered hat that was crushed down over his ears. But as he crossed the path with silent tread he looked up at her, and then she saw his face in the rosy light of the setting sun, and instantly recognised him as Captain George de Carteret's cabin attendant, Hubert.

What was the boy doing here ? she asked herself wonderingly, and in this strange disguise ?

He put a finger to his lips, enjoining caution, and, ere she knew what he intended, he had caught at the ivy on the outer wall of the still-room and mounted to the roof. With the agility of one accustomed to climbing a ship's rigging, he made his way toward her until he stood clinging perilously to the ledge of her window. She caught him by both arms and helped to support him, bending down with her face on a level with his.

"Why are you here ?" she demanded in an agitated whisper. "Why have you not gone away with the ship ?"

"You know me, then ?" he said in return. "Listen ! 'Twas Perrotine who saw you here at your window. She is yonder among the bushes, with Captain de Carteret and Corporal Sicklesmith. And the captain bade me climb up to you and request you to tell him if Major Lydcott is within the house."

"Ah !" exclaimed Ruth. "I now know why the soldiers are waiting among the trees. And Captain de Carteret would have me betray my father into

their hands, would he? No, no, Master Hubert. Go back to your captain and bid him come to me himself. For I will tell no one else, and perchance not even him."

"Unkind that you are!" urged Hubert. "Can you not trust me, his messenger? Or will you not steal out to him yourself? Look, he is but a few short yards away."

"Tell him that I am a prisoner in my room and cannot come through locked doors. Go, and quickly, lest you be seen."

"I care not if I be seen," the lad insisted. "No one can know me, for I am a stranger, excepting to you alone."

"Nevertheless," persisted Ruth, "bid him come to me here, for he can climb up as well as you. Yet wait!" she cried quickly. "Ere he comes you must be certain that the way is clear. Listen!" She bent nearer to him. "Attend to my instructions. Go you round to the kitchen door; Guida, the dairymaid, will open it to your knocking. Tell Guida that Corporal Sicklesmith waits outside to see her beside the smoky jennet pear tree. And when she has gone out to meet him (for you will tell him also) then knock again, and yourself engage Madame Aylmer in conversation as long as you may. Speak with her of her son Martin who is on board *The Bramble*, and devise some plausible fiction of how you can rescue him. So, whilst they both are occupied, your captain may come to me without danger of discovery."

Thereupon, approving her plan, Hubert climbed down again. And, watching what happened, Ruth saw him go back to the rhododendrons. Presently Tony Sicklesmith strode off toward the orchard. Hubert went round in search of the kitchen door, and then, after a long interval, George de Carteret

appeared, in his disguise of an old mariner, coming toward her, as the boy had come, across the grass, whilst Perrotine remained to keep watch.

In a very little time Captain de Carteret was at Ruth's window, gripping the ledge with both his strong hands, without her assistance, although she was ready to give help if it should be needed to save him from falling. She knelt so near to him, indeed, that she could feel his breath upon her cheeks and neck, and his eyes seemed to burn into hers as he said :

" 'Tis woeful news that you are imprisoned, Ruth. Who has dared so to illtreat you ? "

She glanced round toward the door, forgetting that in doing so she was exposing to his sight the red marks of Madame Aylmer's hand upon her cheek.

" *Pergui !* " he cried. " And some one has cruelly struck you ! Who ? Who ? Tell me what fiend has been so dastardly as to strike that cheek ! Tell me, I say, and by my faith I will be avenged. "

The marks were hidden in the crimson that mounted swiftly even to the roots of her fair hair.

" 'Twas not of vengeance that you climbed here to speak to me, " she answered him. " Nay, leave me, I beg ! "

He had loosened his grip of the ledge with his left hand and caught at her wrist, drawing her to him.

" I cannot leave you here, " he declared, breathing hard. " I will not leave you to stay another day—another hour—in this accursed house. Come ! I will take you with me now—even at this very moment, if you will leap into my arms and let me carry you away. "

Ruth released herself from his grasp and put her hands behind her back.

"Why are you here?" she asked him pantingly. Her question seemed to remind him of his purpose.

"To arrest Andros Aylmer," he answered her firmly, fixing his eyes upon her with intent scrutiny. "Where is he? For I feel sure you have seen him since coming ashore."

She shook her head.

"I will not tell you," she said almost below her breath.

"Then you know," he insisted. "You have indeed seen him?" He waited for her answer, but she did not give it. "Ruth Aylmer," he went on, "tell me where that traitor now is!"

"What?" she cried in agitation. "Would you ask me—me!—to betray him into your hands for you to cast him into your dungeons? Was it for that reason that you put me ashore so readily—that I might come here and act the spy upon my own foster-father? Were I to yield to your entreaty should I not myself prove false? Would you not despise me utterly?"

"How could I despise you for doing your duty?" he questioned.

"Then ask me no more," she resumed proudly. "For surely my duty is to my foster-father, whose bread I have eaten and whose home is my home."

George de Carteret raised himself further to the window-edge, taking a new foothold. He watched her face, finding it hard to understand her seeming obstinacy.

"Surely a loyal subject's highest duty is to his King," he retorted. "And if toward me you are obdurate, then in the King's name, whose commission I hold, I command you to tell me what I ask. Is Andros Aylmer within this house?"



She went nearer to him then and with hesitation answered.

"Since you command me so, and will not despise me, how can I refuse you? He is not now within this house, but departed hence hardly an hour ago—I know not whither."

De Carteret nodded.

"In which direction went he?" he then demanded.

Again she hesitated.

"Whither could any man go to hide himself from you and the soldiers who are with you?" she asked.

He smiled. "Nay, I know not. But if you were yourself such a fugitive as he, where would you go to hide?"

She put her hand to her cheek, feeling that his eyes were lingering upon the red marks.

"In such a case," she rejoined, "one might find many a less goodly refuge than the Sea Wolf's Cave."

"So I should think," he ruminated. "Faith, 'tis a likely enough place. And now, since my position at this window is by no means comfortable, I will bid you farewell." He held out his hand to her.

"Wait," she said hurriedly laying her own hand in his, and allowing him to press it to his lips. "Seek not to discover how I know, but let me confide to you that Sir Philip is in danger—in dire and immediate danger from a secret enemy who has found his way into Elizabeth Castle with intent to compass his death."

Dropping her hand, George de Carteret clutched at the window-ledge to save himself from falling. Ruth flung her arms about his neck.

“Go !” she implored him. “Go while there is yet time. And—God be with you !”

“And with you,” he responded, looking back at her with a yearning in his eyes which made her heart quicken its throbbing.

## CHAPTER XVI

### LILETTE AYLMER'S LOAF

IT was evident that Madame Aylmer seriously considered Ruth a most dangerous person to be at liberty, or to be allowed to hold intercourse with the outside world in which political plotting and personal intrigue were so rife. Her vindictive spite against the girl might have been satisfied in the infliction of a few hours' confinement ; but in her fear lest, if liberated, Ruth should exercise her power for mischief by communicating inconvenient secrets to the enemy, Lilette extended the term of imprisonment to an unusually long period, and for three whole days and four dreary nights Ruth was kept locked in her room with no other food than bread and water ; and it is probable that she would not have been set free even then had it not happened that old Grace, the house servant, had been seized with an attack of rheumatism. Guida, therefore, had double work in the kitchen, and when baking day came round Ruth's help with the cows and the chickens was absolutely necessary.

On the morning of her release, she came downstairs looking changed ; or so, at least, Guida thought as she watched her going about her accustomed duties. Her cheeks and forehead were more transparently fair and waxen than formerly ; there were dark shadows about her eyes ; her eyes themselves

looked fuller and more brightly clear, with a deeper sadness lurking under their long lashes. Even her hands seemed to have become more white and delicate, with the blue veins showing like violets under snow.

Guida took these changes to be the outward signs of suffering, if not of actual illness ; but it was rather that in her temporary withdrawal from hard, coarse work, Ruth had regained some of her natural refinement and purity of beauty. Her fairness was enhanced by the severe simplicity of the black frock that she wore. It was very plainly made, clinging to the graceful lines of her figure, with a long skirt which almost touched the ground. She wore a little close-fitting cap of soft black cloth, edged with lace of her own making, and there was a tippet of starched white linen about her neck and shoulders.

"Upon my life !" exclaimed Guida at first sight of her, as Ruth entered the kitchen with a bowl of fresh eggs, which she had brought in from the hen-house. "One would think 'twas the Sabbath to see you arrayed thus in church-going finery !"

Ruth took the eggs to the dresser.

"Finery ?" she repeated softly. "In what does consist the finery ? I am as plainly clad as the poorest garch in all Jersey. And my every garment is made by my own fingers."

Guida, kneeling at the fireplace, looked up at her again.

"Well, I'll not deny the plainness," she acknowledged. "In truth y'are even poorly clad, now that I regard you. Even a beggar maid might wear the selfsame things and still plead poverty. I know not how it is, Ruth," she went on, busily striking at her flint and steel to light the fire, "but though you were to go about dressed in the veriest rags, you'd still

look dainty and clean as a new opened lily ! I vow 'tis your surpassing beauty and fairness that exalts you above the common sort. For in truth you are high above them all ! Had I been as fair, I warrant me that young Master Merry would have noticed me yestermorn, and not walked past me on the draw-bridge without so much as a look."

"And pray who is Master Merry ?" asked Ruth. "I know him not."

Guida was fanning the smouldering tinder in the fire, and, when she had coaxed it into a flame, she answered :

"Marry, he is the handsome young cornet of Dragoons who is newly stationed with the garrison at Mont Orgueil."

It was well that Guida's eyes were turned to the fire : otherwise she might have observed Ruth's quickly responding look of consternation ; for Ruth did not doubt that "Merry" was the assumed name of the refugee Prince of Wales, and the circumstance of His Royal Highness taking his walks unattended beyond the castle walls suggested many perplexing thoughts to her mind. Among them was the thought that surely the Prince would not thus venture abroad without escort if Andros Aylmer were still at large to be a constant menace to his safety.

Throughout the three days of her enforced seclusion in her room, removed from all communication with the outer world, Ruth had anxiously wished to learn if George de Carteret had succeeded in tracking and capturing her foster-father ; but now she felt certain that he must have done so, and that the proscribed traitor was securely confined within one of the darksome dungeons of the castle. Was it in order that she might try to convey some secret



message to the prisoner that Guida had gone to Mont Orgueil on the previous morning? Why else should she have crossed the drawbridge?

Ruth lingered beside Guida, preparing a discreet question which should draw from her the desired information. She wished further to ask her if anything untoward had happened to Sir Philip de Carteret, and also whether Martin Aylmer had returned to Beau Desert. These questions clamoured to be answered; but, just as she was about to begin upon them, her foster-mother entered the kitchen to cut the bacon for breakfast, and the chance of further conversation with Guida was at an end.

"I trust that you have regained your proper senses, and that we are to have no more of your outrageous behaviour," said Lilette Aylmer, very haughtily receiving Ruth's morning greeting and customary curtsy. "You will do Guida's outdoor work to-day, as well as your own."

Ruth was glad to escape from the kitchen into the open air, and to attend to the cows, who neither frowned nor spoke crossly. Having more than usual to occupy her, she was late for the family breakfast. For this she was not sorry, since Madame had eaten very little, and had left two eggs as well as a small slice of fried bacon, which, being with permission appropriated, went far towards appeasing the girl's hunger after her three days' fast.

To Ruth's surprise, as she passed through the house and glanced into the workroom, she observed Lilette Aylmer busily writing: a thing which she had seldom seen her doing, and she marvelled what could be the occasion of this unaccustomed activity with the quill, particularly on a busy morning. She was

still more perplexed when, later in the forenoon, she had reason to go into the kitchen. Madame Aylmer was there, helping Guida with the baking, and had already made some four or five loaves, which stood in front of her awaiting their turn to be put into the oven. She was shaping another one, somewhat different in form from the rest, and smaller ; and as Ruth, herself unseen, casually looked towards her, she saw her take something white from out the pocket of her blue apron and deftly thrust it with her finger into the very heart of the soft dough.

Instinctively Ruth drew back, lest she should be seen and suspected of prying curiosity. She was not by nature inquisitive, and she dreaded to be thought so. It was no concern of hers what Lilette Aylmer chose to conceal within the loaf, or why she should conceal it. Nevertheless, as she withdrew, Ruth could not help being conscious that there was something singularly secretive and guilty in her foster-mother's manner as she forced the thing into its peculiar hiding-place and covered it over as if it were not there. It was not the mischievous secrecy of the magpie which had prompted the act ; nor the playful trick of a child who hides a trinket in cake or pudding for others to find. Lilette Aylmer was anything but playful, and there was serious purpose in what she had done.

Ruth recognised the same loaf again when it was brought out hot from the cavernous oven and placed with others of the batch on the dresser. No one would have guessed that its rich brown crust covered anything else than ordinary wholesome bread, and Guida did not even observe that it was different in shape from its companions. For a moment Ruth thought of the nursery tale of Snowwhite and the poisoned apple. Was it possible that Lilette

Aylmer had secreted poison within the loaf? If so, by whom was it intended that the loaf should be eaten?

"Now, I wonder if 'tis for me that the poison is designed?" she asked herself. Then she thrilled with the horror of the unworthy thought and instantly dismissed it. "After all," she decided, "perhaps it was nothing but my own silly fancy!"

Yet, when again she entered the kitchen to put a saucepan of soup on the fire for dinner, she discovered that the particular loaf had disappeared.

Lilette Aylmer was particularly amiable over dinner. She asked Ruth some questions about Martin which Ruth answered discreetly, and then turned to Guida and spoke of poor Dean Bandinel imprisoned in Mont Orgueil Castle and perhaps famishing for the want of decent food. She exhibited an extraordinary commiseration for the unfortunate victim of Royalist oppression.

"It has occurred to me that 'twould be a Christian charity to send him some of your new made bread and some fresh eggs, Guida," she remarked, as if the thought had just occurred to her.

"Yes," agreed Guida, "if the guards would permit it."

It seemed to Ruth that Guida's acquiescence was suspiciously prompt.

"Wherefore should they not?" questioned Madame; "a loaf or two of innocent bread can do no harm. Of course they will permit it. Ruth shall take it this afternoon. 'Twill be an agreeable excursion for her after her seclusion within doors. And a posy of primroses for Mademoiselle Perrotine, taken in addition, will let them see that we are disposed to be friendly, in spite of what has happened. It shall be done this very day."

When Ruth had washed up the dinner things and made herself tidy, replacing her linen tippet with a wide lace collar, her foster-mother handed her a little basket, and requested her to deliver it at the castle postern, together with a bunch of choice primroses which she was to gather by the way.

“Break not the eggs,” Madame cautioned. “And when you return you shall have a fresh loaf all to yourself, spread with the best butter.”

Ruth made no demur, but took the basket, wondering only whether the loaf promised for herself might perchance be the one which Madame had made. As she crossed the farmyard, picking her way among the pools left by a recent shower of rain, she was aware of footprints other than her own or Guida’s in the soft ground. They were the prints of a man’s leather boots, and not of wooden sabots such as the ploughmen and Guida and she herself wore when out of doors about the farm ; and she at once associated them with Andros Aylmer.

Had he come back, then ? Had not Captain de Carteret arrested him after all ? Assuredly he was not a captive in Mont Orgueil, or it would have been to him rather than to David Bandinel that these provisions which she was now carrying would have been sent. And, also, Lilette Aylmer would hardly have been so amiable at dinner had her husband fallen into the clutches of the Royalists. No, it was clear that, whether these were his footmarks or not, he still was free and at liberty to carry on his plots and intrigues.

After the rain, the fields and hedgerows were vividly green in the warm spring sunshine. Larks were singing in the clear blue sky, the air was warm with the delicious perfume of flowers, and the plenteous

primroses seemed to smile at her as she passed along the lanes. Ruth loved the flowers with a passionate adoration, and knew where to find those which were rarest and most beautiful. She did not gather any of them yet, but went on across the meadows toward a sheltered dingle, where grew the largest and sweetest violets in all Jersey. Before she entered the dingle, she went aside to leave her basket in a safe place within the hollow trunk of an oak tree which she had found one day when following a squirrel to its cosy den among the dry leaves. As she was about to thrust the basket within she hesitated and drew back the white napkin to make sure that none of the eggs had been broken. She had not looked into the basket before, but now a little cry of astonishment escaped her, for among the eggs she discovered Lilette Aylmer's loaf.

There could be no possible doubt that it was the same. Ruth knew its peculiar shape too well to make any mistake. Even now as she looked down upon it she could discern the depression on the top surface where her foster-mother had buried the thing which she had taken from the pocket of her apron. Ruth wondered what the thing could have been. All that she knew was that it was quite small, and that it was white. She could only fancy that it was a tiny strip of white linen in which something was wrapped.

For once in her life she realised the meaning of temptation. A strange, irresistible eagerness seized her to know what that hidden thing might be. She could almost have dared to break open the loaf and disclose its secret before carrying it to its intended destination. The temptation became even stronger when she reflected that the contents of the basket were to be delivered to David Bandinel, a



condemned traitor, convicted of conspiracy against the King.

What could Lilette Aylmer be sending to him that needed to be hidden so strictly in the innocent heart of a loaf of bread? Ruth felt assured now that the bread and the eggs were of very little importance compared with the contents of that loaf; that indeed they were but the outward cover and excuse for conveying into the prisoner's hands something which was of far more vital consequence than the gift of a few dainties to a hungry man.

As in a flash, she remembered seeing her foster-mother writing. It could be no trivial reason which would bring Lilette Aylmer to the use of a quill. Ruth had never known her to use one excepting when copying recipes in her cookery book, or balancing her accounts, or inscribing labels for her pickle and jam pots. What she had been writing to-day could surely be nothing less than a pressing message or letter, conveying news or instructions to the imprisoned conspirator—news of something which had occurred, or instructions for some evil purpose yet to be performed.

The private conversation which she had overheard between Andros Aylmer and his wife came back to the girl, word for word. They had spoken of David Bandinel's plot to do injury to Sir Philip de Carteret. Was this secret letter concerned with that same perfidious intrigue, or were there other and equally criminal schemes on foot?

"And so she has made me her messenger—*me!*" Ruth murmured to herself in indignation at the cunning ruse of which she was the innocent instrument. Her hand was upon the loaf ready to tear it open and discover its secret when, from some distance away, the sound of horses' hoofs and the rattle of

accoutrements came to her. Shortly afterward, from much nearer, she heard a laugh. A lightsome, boyish laugh, it was ; but its nearness alarmed her, and hastily she closed the basket and thrust it within the hollow of the tree, carefully covering it with dead leaves. Then she stood back, to assure herself that nothing could be seen and that not even a broken twig or the impress of her sabots on the soft earth remained to betray that anyone had been near.

With her heart beating in quick consternation, she wandered into the dingle and began idly to pluck the violets. There were not so many as she had expected, or else her agitation of mind made her less alert than usual to discover them, and she had sauntered the whole length of the dingle before she had gathered a presentable bunch. She decided to surround the violets with a wreath of primroses from a copse where they grew abundantly beyond an intervening stretch of wild gorseland.

As yet, she was undecided whether or not to take the flowers to Perrotine de Carteret. If she did so, it would only be in order that she might fulfil this part of her instructions and be furnished with a pretext for going to Mont Orgueil Castle. She knew that she dared not return to Beau Desert and pretend that she had been to the castle if she had not been. Yet she was very certain that whatever should be the penalty of her neglect, her basket and its contents would never be delivered ; that she would never even make the attempt to deliver them. It might be sinful to disobey, but were there not occasions in life when disobedience became a duty ? She resolved that she would disobey, be the consequences what they might.

She was slowly steeling herself to the act of

wilful opposition, and gathering courage to carry out the necessary deception, when an incident, as fateful as it was unforeseen, relieved her of her burden of perplexity and at the same time altered the whole course of her life.

## CHAPTER XVII

### FACE TO FACE

AT the edge of the copse, Ruth had come upon a beautiful bank of very large primroses, and had stooped among their golden clusters to cull them one by one by their long, frail stalks, the while she listened to the mellow song of a thrush in a neighbouring tree and the fainter carol of a soaring lark. All Nature ministered to her senses, and she forgot her troubles in her joy of the perfumed flowers, the sunlit air, the verdant land and the melody of the birds. For a while, she was childishly, exultantly happy, and the whole world seemed young and kind and throbbing with eternal hope.

Suddenly she started to her feet at the sound of a movement behind her. She turned quickly in nervous alarm and her bunch of violets and primroses fell scattered to the grass. Two youths stood confronting her, one taller than the other. They were both saluting her with courtly grace, bowing their bared heads and sweeping the daisies with the plumes of their cavalier hats.

Ruth knew them in an instant, and, taking a step forward, she curtsied very low, confused and trembling. When she stood upright again, hardly daring to look at them, her sudden paleness gave place to a rush of deep crimson that overspread her neck and cheeks and brow, as the pink glow of the sunrise overspreads the morning sky.

"Give you good day, Mademoiselle Ruth," said the taller of the two, crushing his hat under his elbow and standing with his heels together looking, as she thought, the very embodiment of a King's son, which she knew him to be.

"Permit me," said his companion, going down on his knees at her feet to gather her scattered treasures.

"So we meet once more," resumed the Prince, with his eyes bent admiringly upon her beauty. "In vain until this happy moment have I looked to renew the acquaintance of our moonlight adventure. Truly, Mademoiselle, I am right glad to see you."

"Wherefore?" she faltered, raising her blue eyes to his embarrassing gaze.

He put forth his right hand in greeting.

"Wherefore? Why, to thank you, for one reason. And, for another, because it gives me delight to look again upon your fairness and contemplate the sweet violets in your eyes."

Instinctively she held out her hand to his clasp, and, before releasing it, he touched her fingers with his lips.

"To thank you," he repeated, "for what you did that night for Perrotine de Carteret and—and her companion. 'Twas truly noble of you, Mademoiselle, to sacrifice your liberty for our sakes. Believe me, 'twill not be forgotten."

Ruth seemed to have lost the power of speech, and, to cover her nervous confusion, she sank to her knees and began to collect her fallen violets.

"Nay, Hubert will rescue your posies," the Prince intervened. "I beg you to be seated upon the bank, that we may have speech together."

She obeyed, and he went nearer to her, standing in front of her and looking down into her sunlit face with its frame of loose golden hair.



"Do you know me?" he asked her very gently.

"Yes, sir," she softly answered. "I think I should. Yet I may not speak your name."

"You can call him Jack Merry," interposed Hubert, glancing up at her mischievously.

Ruth shook her head.

"I could not so presume," she objected, nervously trembling at the very thought of being so close within the royal presence.

"I'll forgive the presumption," the Prince smiled, planting his foot on the slope of the bank beside her and resting his elbow on his knee, assuming an attitude of most easy familiarity which instantly restored her courage. "Nay, what is there that I would not forgive you?"

"The using of the mirror in your cabin, for example," promptly suggested Hubert, rising to his feet and arranging the flowers in his hand.

"As to that, thou saucy jackanapes," rejoined the Prince, "I can but regret that Mademoiselle left not her permanent reflection in the glass as a record of her occupancy. Tut! Thou'rt clumsy, Hubert," he protested, watching the boy's struggles with the flowers. "Thou'st got no skill in the making up of a posy. Did you not see how daintily 'twas done before, with the primroses ringed about the violets? You have mixed them shamefully, like a very mob of rebels and royalists in confused disorder. Give them to me ere you spoil them!"

"And prithee which be the rebels?" Ruth ventured to inquire.

"I'd say the violets," he answered quickly, "for they are shrewdly ill to handle, and most unruly."

He had seated himself on the grass at Ruth's feet and was industriously rearranging the bouquet

on his knees. Ruth regarded him in silence, while Hubert strolled apart, searching among the bushes for bird's-nests, yet not wandering out of sight.

"And so Madame Aylmer has seen fit at last to set you at liberty?" the Prince remarked, binding the flower stalks with a long reed. "I'll engage that she wrung no secrets from you."

"Nor would she, had she imprisoned me for a twelvemonth," Ruth asserted firmly.

"Faith, I believe that," said he, inhaling the fragrance of the violets with evident enjoyment. "If you are all that Sir George de Carteret reports, 'twere easier far to squeeze blood from a stone."

Ruth glanced at him curiously, anxiously.

"Sir George?" she repeated, perplexed.

He returned her glance.

"You have not heard, then, of the death of his father?"

"What!" exclaimed Ruth with a sharp intake of her breath. "Sir Philip—dead? When? How?"

"Alas!" sighed the Prince, suddenly changing his mood from joy to gloom. "'Tis but too true. Your warning to Captain George was not in time. For when he arrived at Elizabeth Castle, as he did within an hour after he had spoken with you at your window, the worst had happened. The assassin had done his work."

"*Mai doux!*" cried Ruth, clutching at a fold of her skirt. "And 'twas at the instigation of Bandinel and Andros Aylmer!"

She rose slowly to her feet. He stood up also, and handed her the flowers.

"You did your best to avert the tragedy," he assured her. "And Sir George is grateful to you—as I am also." He closed his fingers over hers. "And some day—if ever I am king—you shall know the full

meaning of my gratitude. I vow you shall be a countess, at the least."

"Oh, sir," she stammered awkwardly, trying to release herself. "Forget not that I am but a poor peasant maid, unworthy of your royal notice. Leave me, I beg! Nay——"

She broke off abruptly, staring beyond him with wild, dilated eyes. Then she drew her hand from his clasp, and with a sharp cry of terror flung her arms about him and threw him bodily aside.

Amazed at her strength and the violence of her inexplicable rebuff, he turned, yet more amazed, to see her struggling desperately with a tall man, from whose grip she had just wrested a formidable dagger, of which he was endeavouring to regain possession. Drawing his sword, the Prince leapt forward to her rescue. But already young Lord Debenham had seized her unknown assailant from behind, and Ruth, released, stood back panting, defiantly holding the dagger ready to strike.

She shot a glance over her left shoulder at the Prince, anxious for his safety, caring nothing for her own.

"Nay, put away thy blade, Jack," she cried with the presence of mind which always served her in moments of crisis, "'tis but Andros Aylmer, seeking to punish me for my truancy. He'll do me no harm. Leave me to him, and go you back to barracks. I'll not see you again to-day."

The Prince demurred, not understanding.

"Go!—Go quickly!" she urged, as though she were dismissing a common trooper whose presence was undesired.

He slowly sheathed his sword and moved reluctantly backward, yet implicitly trusting to her ready wisdom to adjust the situation. She was in danger, he knew; but he could not believe that any man

would do her bodily harm. Then as he strode farther apart and saw that she was in reality safe from immediate molestation, that her disarmed assailant had drawn sullenly back from her, he seemed to grasp her meaning. She desired him to summon help while she detained the man, so that he, Andros Aylmer, the convicted traitor and outlaw, might be presently arrested. And with the purpose of obeying her he hastened off to alarm the escort of troopers waiting beyond the copse. Hubert followed him as in duty bound, and Ruth was left alone, face to face with her enemy.

The anger in Andros Aylmer's eyes was like a burning fire ; yet he controlled himself and made no attempt to touch her, but only stood looking at her intently with his close-cropped head bent forward and his hands tightly clenched. She had frustrated his intention, and had disarmed him. It almost seemed as if he were afraid of her. He coughed nervously, and then spoke deep in his throat :

"Give me that weapon," he commanded, holding out his hand.

Ruth drew back a step, keeping her eyes fixed upon him, watching his every movement. She had gripped the long dagger in her two hands by point and haft, and now, seeing his growing impatience to get hold of it, she raised it swiftly and struck it across her knee, breaking it in two separate pieces, which she cast contemptuously at his feet.

"Take it thus," she cried

She kept her distance from him, expecting him to spring upon her and do her some bodily injury. But he only gave a hollow, mocking laugh. He was more cool in emergency than was his wife, and less impulsive ; and also it appeared that he recognised the value of Ruth's good will as fully as he realised

the danger of her open enmity. He had decided to take refuge in conciliation.

"Wherefore this unseemly indignation?" he inquired, assuming a calmness of tone which belied the rage in his heart. "'Tis unlike you, Ruth. Have I forfeited your daughterly affection during my absence from home?" He kicked aside the two fragments of the dagger. "Didst suppose that I designed to make use of it?" he questioned. "Sure, you misunderstand why I am here—why I stole toward you a moment since. I vow 'twas but to protect you from the impudent attentions of the young spark who was molesting you."

Ruth did not attempt to hide the contempt with which she heard this audacious falsehood. Had she not seen his weapon uplifted to strike the Prince? Had she not herself arrested the intended blow? Nay, was not her hand now wet with the warm blood which was trickling from a nipping wound in the arm that had arrested it?

"Your interference upon my behalf was quite uncalled for, Master Lydcott," she retorted disdainfully, laying stress upon the name that he had assumed. She saw him wince as if a lash had stung him. "As for molestation——"

She broke off with a shrug of her shoulders, casting upon him a look of supreme derision.

"Oh, then, he was not wholly a stranger to you?" he pursued with a cunning leer.

"'Tis not my habit to foregather with strangers," she answered him, stooping to pick up the violets which had fallen to the ground in her struggle.

"Yet you are passing young to be thinking of sweethearts," was his taunting rejoinder. "'Tis true that you have grown, and vastly improved in good looks whilst I have been absent in England, and I'll



allow that the fellow has ample cause to be attracted in your direction. Prithee, who is he ? ”

Ruth moved as if to go.

“ Who is he ? ” Aylmer repeated, following her.

“ It matters not,” she answered with forced indifference, the while she fastened the flowers to the front of her white lace collar.

“ But I have a right to know,” he insisted.

She looked back at him, braving his importunity.

“ You have suggested that he is a sweetheart,” she said calmly. “ And you may even let it rest at that. I’ll not deny the impeachment.”

He took a slow, stealthy stride nearer to her.

“ Who is he, I say ? ” he demanded yet again, the muscles of his shaven cheeks working nervously, his hands clenching and unclenching themselves.

Ruth wondered if he knew, or if he guessed and wished only to confirm his conjectures. She raised her eyebrows as if in surprise at his insistence.

“ Marry, since you are so anxious to learn what concerns you not, he is a soldier of the garrison at Mont Orgueil, and a well spoken gallant, I assure you.”

“ ’Tis plain to see that he is a soldier,” Andros Aylmer frowned, “ but that is not enough for me, and you are but prevaricating. Answer me straight-way, who is he ? Whence came he ? What brings him to Jersey ? What is his name ? ”

“ *Certes !* What a catechism of questions ! You may as well complete the list by asking how many teeth he has in his head withal ! ”

Her assumed levity irritated him.

“ A truce to your equivocation ! ” he cried angrily.

“ I command you to tell me the fellow’s name ! ”

“ And if I choose not to tell you ? ” she returned with composure.

He saw that she was resolute.

"Then I will force you," he declared. "You shall be sent back to your room as before. Though I torture you within an inch of your life, you shall tell!"

He leapt at her with both hands outstretched to seize her, but she skipped aside and faced him menacingly.

"Touch me at your peril!" she cried in defiance. "Lay but a finger upon me, and, as I live, you shall suffer." She drew a boatswain's silver whistle from her bosom. "Listen!" she went on more firmly. "Do you not hear the approach of horsemen? I have but to sound this whistle, and you are their prisoner on the King's own warrant for your treachery!"

He shrank from her, hearing the patter of horses' feet and the jingle of bit and stirrup.

"What! You'd betray me?" he cried; "me, your own father?"

She looked at him with scorn.

"I thank Heaven that you are no father of mine," she retorted.

"Ungrateful brat!" he stammered, now roused to impotent rage. "Get you from me!" he commanded. "Get you to your home, and I will deal with you there!"

He moved to push her onward, but she eluded him and raised the whistle as if to blow it, lowering it again as he shrank back.

"I have no home," she panted, "I have no home. And as for yours, which has been the scene of my thralldom for so long, I am done with it, for ever. Never again—nay, even though I starve for the want of a crust—never again will I enter your doors. Traitor! Assassin!"

He seized her then by her long hair, in which he

coiled his fingers to drag her to the ground ; but her hands were free, and even as he wrestled to overpower her she had put the whistle to her lips and blown a long shrill blast.

“ *Haro ! Haro !* ” she cried aloud. But help was already at hand, and, as he released her and ran off to where he had left his horse, a party of mounted cavaliers appeared, led by Lancelot de Carteret, galloping in hot pursuit.

Ruth ran also and hid herself in the copse, her heart beating furiously as she listened.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A COUNCIL OF FIVE

“ODD’s my life, Master Merry, how you did startle me, to be sure ! I’d no notion the room was occupied !”

Rachel had been carrying in the lighted candles, and was placing them on an end of the table, when the Prince turned in the chair before the fire where he had been dozing.

“Verily, I took you for some secret assassin about to spring out upon me !” she declared with agitation.

“You are easily startled,” he remarked, watching her proceed to remove a splash of candle-grease from the polished oak with a corner of her apron.

“I do tremble at the meanest thing,” she averred. “These late disturbances and alarms have shaken my nerves, I suppose.”

He stood up and stretched himself, yawning, to give colour to the idea that he was but a common soldier.

“Ay, I doubt not that you are passing weary,” she said, wetting the corner of her apron with her tongue and continuing to rub at the table. “Nor do I marvel at it, for the duty of dancing attendance upon my young Lord Debenham all day long is surely irksome.” Rachel had accepted without question the understanding that Cornet Merry had been appointed as personal equerry to Lord Debenham ;

whereas the reverse was the actual case. "Why persons of quality should need such attention, I know not," she pursued. "Sure, it must be something of a burden to them never to be left alone. We have much to be thankful for in being born of plain, untitled folk, Master Merry."

"For my own part, I envy no man his title," he candidly acknowledged.

"Nor I, neither," Rachel agreed. "High birth is but an accident ; and we are all as God made us. My own father was an honest schoolmaster, Heaven rest him, who died in teaching me my A B C, which remains the sum total of my poor scholarship ; and I'll engage that yours was no higher than a respectable esquire."

"I trust that I may end no lower," he smiled.

Rachel breathed audibly upon the oaken surface.

"Well, as to that," she demurred, "I'd say you are not without the ambition to rise at least to the possession of a captain's commission. And, i'faith, your chance of commanding a company of Horse is quite the equal of Master Lancelot's ; a promising soldier he ; though lacking the headpiece of his brother George, who hath ever been mountains high above him in wisdom and ability. 'Tis my own belief that Lancelot had better have remained in England to be in the way of promotions ; for he'll get none here, wanting Court favour. There is small opportunity for a soldier to win distinction in an obscure garrison like this, as you'll find to your cost, Master Jack, if so be you remain with us."

"Should you then advise me to seek preferment in another direction ?" he asked, leaning against the edge of the table and folding his arms.

Rachel tottered toward the hearth and put a new log upon the sinking fire.



"Nay, I know not," she answered. "And, for my part, I'd be sorry to be rid of thee. But Captain George—begging his pardon, I should now say Sir George—has ever held that if a youth would rise in the world he should turn his eyes toward London, where advancement is surest."

"'Tis the likeliest place, o' my conscience—to get lost in, withal."

"Hast ever been there?"

"Well, yes, on a time."

"Lud! Then thou'rt travelled, and hath seen the world! Prithee, hast e'er seen the King's palace of St. James's?"

He chuckled.

"More than that," he answered her, contemplating her wrinkled face and frosty hair under her wide mob cap. "I have even seen his Majesty himself; who upon one occasion condescendingly patted me upon the cheek. What thinkest thou of that, now?"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Rachel in admiring astonishment. "Which cheek? 'Twould pleasure me to kiss it, an' you'd let me."

"You'd make me blush, Rachel," he laughed, escaping from her.

As he crossed the room, Perrotine entered. She waited until Rachel had gone out, looking extremely red and confusedly guilty. Then said she:

"Sir George would speak with you, sir. Might it please Your Royal Highness to receive him?"

"By all means," returned the Prince.

Sir George de Carteret came in, dressed in black velvet, in token of mourning for his dead father. He was followed by young Lord Debenham and Lancelot. This was his first visit to Mont Orgueil since the night of the tragedy, and Perrotine did not fail to mark the shadow of

gloom that had come into his face under his grief and his new responsibilities ; for in addition to inheriting the baronetcy, he had now become by succession the King's Lieutenant-Governor of Jersey, and the whole control and government of the island had fallen into his hands.

Having paid his addresses to the Prince, he stood with his back to the fire. Perrotine sat facing him in the chair recently occupied by the Prince.

"Let us to business," he began solemnly. And, turning to his brother Lancelot, he asked :

"What of your prisoners? Are they safe?"

"Quite safe," Lancelot nodded. "They are still in the Harleston Tower, with a guard posted at the door. Escape is impossible."

"I'd not say impossible," Sir George corrected him. "Nothing is wholly impossible to a determined man like David Bandinel. Double your guard. Strengthen your door locks. See that the windows of their cell are protected against escape."

The Prince glanced at him inquiringly.

"The windows?" he interrupted. "Sure, he'd be a monstrously clever prisoner who should contrive to fly out from a nest so high!"

"I could do it myself." Sir George bowed to him deferentially. "Had I a few fathoms of rope to take me down as far as the ivy, 'twould not be hard, I assure you. And Bandinel is clever—monstrously clever." Turning to Lancelot, he continued : "Let none but your most trusty servants enter that cell, upon any pretext. And, beyond all things, see that no morsel of food, no clothing, no straw, is allowed to cross the threshold ere it has been thoroughly searched and examined. Remember that a message may be conveyed even within the core of an apple."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Perrotine, moving

restlessly in her chair. "I'd never have thought it possible! What of the basket of bread and onions that was sent up to them yestermorn, I wonder!"

Her brother George turned to her sharply.

"Whence came it?" he demanded to know, slowly removing his gaze from her to Lancelot. "Whence came that basket?"

Lancelot nervously fingered his upper lip.

"From the farmstead of Beau Desert," he admitted awkwardly.

"Ah!" Sir George frowned in disapproval. "Just as you might have expected—straight from the veriest hotbed of revolt and sedition! And who, pray, was the messenger?"

Lancelot's eyes wandered appealing to Perrotine.

"'Twas the dairymaid, Guida Halkett," Perrotine timidly answered. "Guida delivered the basket into the hands of Corporal Sicklesmith, who afterwards returned it unto her, empty."

There was an expression of relief in Sir George de Carteret's face.

"I at least needed no assurance that it was not Ruth," he reflected aloud. "Ruth would be more discreet than to allow herself to become the messenger of treason. And she is alert enough to have scented mischief. Would that I could say the same of Guida!"

"Yet even Ruth might conceivably have been made the innocent carrier of evil," suggested the Prince. "Notwithstanding your trust in her, she might be hoodwinked."

"I'd trust to her innocence, as to her wisdom, in all things in which neither Andros Aylmer nor his wife had any hand," George de Carteret declared, "for she is as discreet as she is honest, whilst at the same time she is staunchly loyal to the Crown. I'd

trust her not to let herself be tricked or cajoled by any rebel schemer, even though he lived in the farm of Beau Desert. But nevertheless," he continued, turning again to his brother, "whether Ruth or any else be the messenger, nothing which comes from Beau Desert Farm must in future be permitted to pass within the gates. These are my instructions, Lancelot. See that they are followed. And I beseech you to have a care and to take every precaution lest some rebel plot or plan of conspiracy has entered already with those onions."

He paused and then resumed, speaking meditatively, and to no one in especial, although his glance was directed searchingly upon Lord Debenham:

"I presume that 'tis not known whether or not Ruth Aylmer has been set free from her imprisonment in the room wherein she was locked?"

Debenham met his inquiring eyes and responded promptly:

"She is free, Sir George, and has suffered no great ill, beyond the loss of her proper food and the enjoyment of liberty. We met her to-day, the Prince and I, and had speech with her, and——"

He hesitated.

"Well?" urged Sir George in a lighter mood than he had yet shown since entering the castle.

"'Twas then that she saved His Royal Highness from the knife of a would-be assassin," the boy concluded, watching the effect of the casually stated information upon his master.

George de Carteret gave a quick start and stepped forward.

"What?" he cried, his face reddening, his eyes flashing, "she saved the Prince's life? What mean you? Why was I not instantly informed? How came the Prince to be exposed to such a danger? Who

was the villain that dared so to approach him? Tell me—quick ! ”

Perrotine had leapt to her feet, no less excited than was her brother. It seemed as though she were expecting the Prince to display his wounds ; but he was more calm than anyone else in the room and was obviously unhurt.

Very quietly and circumstantially young Lord Debenham narrated to his eager listeners all that had happened, from the moment when he and the Prince had come unexpectedly upon Ruth Aylmer gathering primroses at the edge of the copse, until, after the encounter, she had bidden the Prince go from her and was left alone with Andros Aylmer.

Sir George strode agitatedly to and fro as he listened.

“ Ah ! ” he said, coming to a sudden halt in his pacing, “ I see how it was. I see clearly. But what I do not clearly see is where the escort were, and what they were doing, to let this thing happen.” Waiting for a moment, he turned angrily upon Lancelot, who stood at attention near the end of the table. “ Where were you and your troopers ? ” he insisted sharply. “ Where were you, sir, and what did you mean by allowing a weaponless girl to do your duty for you ? Did I not caution you to run no risks, but to keep constant watch and guard while these murderous rebels are still skulking round ? Did I not give you my positive orders that you were on no account to allow His Highness to go beyond your sight and call ? Where is the use of an armed escort, if it is not to be at hand, on the spot, in a moment of danger ? Zounds, boy, you deserve to be soundly thrashed for your neglect ! Nay, give me no excuses. Your conduct is inexcusable. You knew your duty ; you knew your responsibilities ; and you ignored them



both. Incompetent that you are, why, that girl Ruth Aylmer is worth a hundred such as you ! ”

“ I saw no danger,” stammered Lancelot, penitently hanging his head. “ And, surely,” he pleaded, “ His Royal Highness may be permitted sometimes to wander at his own will, without the close attendance of a crowd of common troopers ! ”

“ You saw no danger, say you ? ” retorted Sir George, pale now with indignation. “ Marry, sir, is danger always to be seen vaunting itself in flying colours ? Do you suppose that an assassin is going to announce his intention with a blare of trumpets ? I’d have thought,” he softened his voice to add, “ that the example of our poor father’s death by treachery had been a sufficient lesson to you in the necessity for constant vigilance. But you let the same subtle serpent come within striking distance of your prince—your future King—leaving it to a weaponless woman to avert the blow ! ”

The Prince himself at this moment intervened.

“ Believe me, Sir George,” he gently protested, “ ’twas my own fault, even more than your brother’s. I bade him hang back with his horsemen, while I went with Hubert a-bird’s-nesting. And then, meeting Mistress Ruth, I fear me I tarried over long in her engaging presence. I would not willingly have left her any sooner ; and doubtless our voices, being heard, told Aylmer where we were to be found.”

Sir George listened respectfully, overcoming his impatience.

“ Sir, I blame you not in any wise,” he rejoined. “ ’Tis for Your Royal Highness always to do as you wish, and for us to protect you from all possible harm. ’Tis good of you to condone my brother’s fault ; but his neglect is not lessened by your explanation of your own part in this affair. Neither does your very

excusable tarrying with Ruth Aylmer account for the fact that her foster-father was nigh to watch you and to hear your voices, and to pounce out upon Your Highness the moment your back was turned. 'Tis clear to me that he had followed either Your Royal Highness or the girl. And in either event I can scarce doubt that he had already penetrated the secret of your identity."

The Prince regarded him steadily for a moment.

"You are right, de Carteret," he nodded. "The rascal has discovered my presence here, despite our precautions. And—dost think it possible—nay, is it not even likely—that the maid was there as a decoy to keep me in pleasant dalliance while her father crept up to use his knife upon me?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Sir George, astounded at this interpretation of Ruth's presence in the copse. "Heaven forbid!" he repeated, his countenance becoming crimson. "No, no—a hundred times no!" he insisted. "For whatever reason Ruth was there, I will stake my life upon it that her purpose was innocent."

Young Lord Debenham, who had been listening intently, stepped forward.

"And I also would stake my life on't," he interposed. "The girl knew no more than we did that the fellow was lying in ambush, awaiting his chance. Her every word, her every look and action, gave evidence of her sweet simplicity and her innocence. And when the moment of her surprise came, as it did when she espied her father rise to spring upon his victim, she behaved most nobly. In an instant, she had flung His Highness aside from the uplifted knife, herself escaping, only by a hair's breadth, the blow intended for the Prince. And, by the look of her in that heroic moment, I'd say that in the circumstances

she would have deemed it a fortunate sacrifice had the blade indeed entered her own heart."

Sir George de Carteret shrank back at the very thought of so gruesome a possibility. He was breathing deeply. His emotion was apparent to all who watched him; but whether it was the thought of Ruth Aylmer's heroism, or of the Prince's narrow escape which caused him to betray such feeling, none could tell.

"Enough!" he murmured pantingly, with a wave of the hand. "Let us be thankful that no worse befell, and that both His Royal Highness and his brave rescuer were unharmed."

"Nay, sir, we know not for a certainty that Ruth Aylmer was scathless," again interposed Hubert, in an anxious voice. "Despite her assurance to us that she was safe, we had hardly turned our backs when she called aloud for help and sounded a shrill alarm from a boatswain's whistle—a silver whistle which I myself had given her as a keepsake on board *The Eagle*. She was therefore herself in danger; unless, peradventure, she was but urging the troopers to hasten to the capture of her assailant."

Sir George had listened attentively to the boy's clearly spoken words. And now, with swift apprehension of Ruth's attitude toward her persecutor, he turned abruptly upon Lancelot.

"You instantly answered her call for help?" he questioned authoritatively.

"Instantly," Lancelot answered. "We were already moving to go in search of the Prince, wondering at his long absence. When His Highness and Hubert ran up to inform me that Major Lydcott was beyond the ridge of the rising ground, I sent His Highness back to the castle under escort, and with the remaining men hastened to the spot. I saw the girl draw apart from

the man, whom I recognised. She was in no danger. It appeared to me that she was urging Lydcott to escape——”

“That is beyond my belief,” declared his brother emphatically. “She had called for help. She had cried ‘*Haro!*’ You had heard her whistle. I’ll be bound that, so far from urging his escape, she was helping you by detaining him, more anxious than you were yourself that he should be captured.”

His eyes were fixed in accusing severity upon Lancelot’s now abashed face.

“You failed, of course,” he went on, his anger rising. “You failed, or I should have heard by now that the scoundrel was safely lodged in the deepest dungeon, awaiting his just punishment. Yes, yes. I see that I am right. You failed to arrest him, failed ignominiously. You let him slip through your fingers for want of the prompt decision which has ever been your besetting fault—your invariable cause of failure. Sdeath! must I do everything myself?”

“I gave him chase,” Lancelot haltingly explained. “When I saw him first, he was already running to mount his horse among the trees. He was quickly in the saddle and galloping off. We followed in pursuit, not heeding Ruth, who needed not our help. We followed through One Man’s Lane, past Gearing’s Farm, and by Belle Épine and Vieux Ménage to Clairval. At Clairval he doubled, and we lost sight of him; but we heard him racing madly at the farther side of Grand Val woods, and we sought to head him off. But when next we sighted his horse ’twas galloping riderless, and Aylmer himself was nowhere to be found, though we searched the woods for an hour and more. Half a company of our men are still out hunting for him.”

“He outwitted you prettily,” commented Sir

George. "Yet you might well have known that, whilst you were searching the woods, he was far away from them, making good his escape to some less likely hiding-place!"

He strode to and fro in front of the fire, with his hands behind his back. Even Perrotine, watching him, was conscious of his commanding dignity. He seemed to her to be no longer the boy whom she had played with in the years gone by, but a full grown, capable man, resolute, brave and wise.

Suddenly he turned again upon Lancelot.

"Well," he thundered, "have you given up the chase? What have you done? In what way have you fulfilled His Majesty's commands that that traitor is to be apprehended? Am I to inform His Majesty that the rascal is still at large, continuing his conspiracies? The two Bandinels are imprisoned here. Bisson and Dumaresq are securely locked up in Elizabeth Castle. But, thanks to your incompetence, Andros Aylmer, the most dangerous of the five, may still go free. What have you done? He cannot have quitted the island. You may trust me to have seen to that. I have ringed the island round with my ships, and no man can come or go without my leave. Marry, I know not why you have come back without him! Has he melted into air? Has he crawled within the earth like a worm? What are your plans for capturing him? For the business is in your hands, and 'tis to you that I look to bring him here, dead or alive."

Lancelot brightened somewhat at thus learning that the quest was not to be withdrawn from him, and he showed his eagerness to go even at once to continue the chase.

"I will go first to the farm of Beau Desert," he decided.

"Faith, 'tis about the last place at which I'd



espect to find him," Sir George objected. "Yet go by all means if 'twill help you to assure yourself that there is no one there, saving Madame Aylmer and the farm servants."

Perrotine wondered at the quickness at which he arrived at this conclusion.

"Will not Ruth be there, then?" she inquired of Sir George, as Lancelot went out.

He shook his head, smiling down at her.

"No," he said gently, "or at the least, I think not. Yet," he added cautiously, "I judge only by my slight knowledge of the girl's proud character. 'Tis but a vague belief; but if I judge her aright, she will never again willingly eat the bread or sleep under the roof of a traitor such as Aylmer."

"Nor would I," declared Perrotine, with a flash in her dark eyes. "I'd sooner starve. I'd sooner make my bed under the friendly stars than be beholden to either him or his wife for so much as a crumb or a drop of water! Though in sooth I had not thought of it before you spoke."

Sir George regarded his sister with a curious fondness. Her comprehension of his surmise seemed to please him. Bowing to the Prince, he moved to follow after Lancelot. At the door he turned, fixing his eyes upon Perrotine with a look of appeal which she could not fail to understand. It was as though his eyes were beckoning to her to accompany him. Presently she curtsied to the Prince and went out also, to find Sir George waiting for her in the corridor.

He took her gently by the hand and drew her with him into the outer hall, saying no word to her until they stood alone together in the dim red light of the wood fire.

## CHAPTER XIX

### AT LOVE'S BEHEST

SIR GEORGE DE CARTERET stood with his hand resting loosely upon his sister's shoulder, and they both of them were looking down into the flickering blue and green flames of the burning sea-logs upon the hearth. They were silent for a time, and then, almost nervously, he spoke, very softly.

"Perrotine," he said, "tell me, did you truly mean those words which you said just now, that were you in Ruth's place you would sooner starve than eat the bread of Andros and Lilette Aylmer—that you would sooner make your bed beneath the cold stars than sleep again under their roof?"

She slowly raised her hand and closed it upon his fingers.

"Yea, most surely did I mean them," she answered. "Wherefore should I so speak if I meant not what I said? Did she not by her bravery to-day declare her loyalty to the Prince, whose life she saved? Did she not set herself in open enmity against the man who has proved himself unworthy of her further consideration? He is not her father. She owes him no duty. In her place, I'd defy him. I'd rather die than be beholden to either him or his equally guilty wife!"

He sighed.

"And you think that Ruth is of a like mind?"

he asked her wistfully. "You should know better than I. Were she a boy, I could understand. A boy could make shift to look after himself and bear the brunt of such open rebellion. But with a maid 'tis different. I cannot think of a maid deserting her only home."

Perrotine felt his fingers tighten within her own. She marvelled at the sudden change that had come over him. A few brief moments ago he had been as a giant of strength, whom nothing could quell, firmly determined and commanding ; but now he was subdued to a lamblike softness and tenderness. His touch was gentle and caressing, his voice was mellow and murmurous, like the rustle of the wind in the pine trees, or the sighing of the waves upon the beach. And never before had she known him speak to her thus, as if he were consulting her opinion.

"Dost believe that she also would have the resolution to throw herself homeless and destitute upon the mercies of the world?" he asked.

"Resolution?" Perrotine repeated. "Sure, 'twould call for no heroic resolution on her part to abandon a home like that, where, if all be true that I have heard, she has received no kindness, but been treated as a hireling menial. They have shown her no pity, they have given her no love, they have thrashed her without mercy, and regarded even her virtues as culpable faults. And now, when he who should have stood to her as a father has shown himself to be a despicable traitor to his King and a vile assassin, do you think that she could endure even to breathe the same air with him? Most surely I could not, and as you know, I cannot pretend to such dauntless spirit as hers."

"Yet 'tis a sacrifice that needs such a spirit," he reminded her. "For a home is a home, and be it

ever so unhappy, there are always the little things that one's heart clings to : little ties to be severed, affections to be buried, associations to be abandoned. None but a seaman knows how in absence one yearns for the familiar anchorage that one calls home. And it irks me sorely to think of Ruth being cast adrift like a helpless ship with no harbour to sail to."

"But," exclaimed Perrotine, "you are talking as if the girl must needs be positively destitute ! Do you suppose that there are no other homes in Jersey ready to open their doors to her ? There is Marie Cary's at St. Ouen's, and Joan Tupper's in St. Helier's, where she is well-known, and there is Madame Gearing's, where they are even now in want of such a helper ; while, at a pinch, we could e'en find room for her here, where she might be of useful service in the kitchen. Sure, I know not why you should concern yourself about her, for she will come to no harm, and is, I am certain, far more capable of bearing hardship than I should be, for example."

Sir George withdrew his hand. Her summing of the resources open to Ruth had disappointed him.

"I had hoped you'd regard her in different wise from that," he said, with a touch of resentment. "You make a huge mistake if you picture her hiring herself out as a humble kitchenmaid. You take no account of her natural pride. No, no, Perrotine, if Ruth should ever enter these gates 'twill not be as a hireling, 'twill not be as an object of condescending pity and charity, but as our trusted friend, which she has ever been, and our equal in all things save worldly riches, which are no measure of personal virtue."

He paused, resting his two hands upon the mantel and staring between them into the red embers of the fire.

"I speak not of the great service to the State which she has performed to-day in saving the life of the Heir to the Throne," he went on, raising his head. "'Tis what you or I, or any else would gladly have done with the same opportunity. She has other and more personal claims than that upon our esteem, and we should be blind had we failed to recognise them."

Perrotine turned to look into his face and was surprised at the glow of fervour in his glistening eyes.

"She is good, she is brave, she is true," she responded; "and I had been blind indeed had I not long since been conscious of her surpassing beauty. But I had not supposed, until now—I had not dreamed that you had given to her more than a passing thought."

He was silent for some moments, and she waited for him to speak.

"Never a day has gone by since first I saw her, a little helpless child drifting upon the waves, but I have thought of her," he declared. "I have thought of her, dreamed of her, prayed for her. From the early time when she could but lisp my name until now, when she has come nigh unto woman's estate, I have watched her growing like an unfolding flower that opens its beauties to the light and sheds its delicious perfumes in the summer air. To me she has been as a sacred presence. I scarce have dared to lift my eyes to hers. Her nearness has been as a spell upon me. The knowledge that she was being unkindly treated has racked me with torture, and I have felt that I would give all that I have in the world, yea, even my very life itself, if the gift would but ensure for her one moment's pleasure."

"You have known her better than I thought," murmured Perrotine.

"Yet never so well as when she came upon my



ship," he continued. "For then was my cup of happiness full, and my belief a certainty. And can you wonder that I am in despair, knowing that she may at this very moment be wandering homeless and destitute?" He paused, breathing unevenly. Then he caught at her wrist. "Perrotine," he cried, "do you not understand?"

"Understand?" she echoed faintly, as if suddenly aroused. "Do you think, then, that I am too young to understand? Well do I see that you are in love with her, George—you, the greatest, richest man in all the islands, ay, richer even than the King himself; and she the humblest and poorest maid, but the most blessed withal. Sure, if any man should ever say of me the things which you have just said of Ruth, I'd deem myself the happiest creature upon earth!"

He dropped her hand and drew back from her, the glow of fervour still burning in his eyes.

"Will you help me, then?" he beseeched her. "'Twas for your help that I brought you here. Help me, by helping her."

"Command me, and you shall see," she answered him promptly. "Bid me do what you will, it shall be done. Wouldst have me search for her? There is no bush or rock or house or cave that I will not explore. Wouldst have me bring her to you? She shall come."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE INTERCEPTED MESSAGE

"Now, Hubert, light me the lantern again and I'll go within," Perrotine whispered to her companion. She went down on her knees behind the sheltering rock and, throwing back her heavy cloak, caught at the little bulls-eye lamp which hung from her girdle, and opened it, holding the wing of her cloak about it as a screen from the night wind.

Hubert knelt in front of her and took out his tinder box.

"Dost really think that she may have hidden herself in a place like this?" he questioned her dubiously, striking the flint and steel together and sending forth a spark. "If she be within the cave, why answered she not when you spoke her name?"

"Well, 'tis our last chance of finding her." Perrotine shivered as a cold gust of wind swept round the corner of the rock. "And if she be not here, we must even go back to the castle and own ourselves defeated; and I am loth to do that."

"'Tis my own belief that she has taken refuge in some cottage or barn," pursued Hubert, "or has made her bed under the lee of some friendly haystack, as I'd have done myself in preference to any cold, dark cave."

"Or I either," agreed Perrotine, watching a tiny smoulder of fire on the tinder where a spark had

alighted. "But, you see, 'tis because the cave is the least likely place that I deem it the most probable."

Hubert laughed at the bull, and the spark went out.

"Nay, I am not jesting," she protested. "If Ruth desired to hide herself rather than to seek comfortable shelter, 'tis what she'd do. Anyone searching for her would look to find her in a barn or cottage, and they'd poke their noses about every haystack they came across ; but none would hope to discover her in a dark, inhospitable cavern ; wherefore, the cavern is the securest refuge."

"Your argument is reasonable," returned her companion, who had again got a spark upon the tinder and was gently husbanding it into a glow. "But wherefore this particular cave rather than the one that Sir George recommended, where ye sought and found her not ?"

"Because this one is well known to Ruth," pursued Perrotine, "and because, as I have told you before, 'twas in here that she herself concealed the two fugitives that you wot of. . . . Ah, now you will get a flame !"

It was already far toward midnight, and the two searchers had tramped many weary miles in their quest for the missing girl, whom they were so anxious to find and take back with them into Mont Orgueil Castle. First, they had gone about the copse where Hubert had seen and spoken with her early in the afternoon. Here, near the bank where she had sat with the Prince, they had found one or two of the violets that she had gathered and discarded ; and Hubert pointed out the marks which the heels of her sabots had made in the soft earth, and the place where she had stood when she flung aside the Prince

to save him from the assassin's dagger. Hubert had not seen her break the weapon across her knee and cast the fragments at her assailant's feet, but he must have found the pieces had they still been there, for he had searched about the ground with the lighted lantern, and Perrotine had picked up a crushed primrose, upon one of whose golden petals there was a splash of red blood.

From the copse they had made their way through the dingle, and, beyond this, Perrotine had turned aside to peer into a hollow tree which was well known to her in the faint hope that Ruth might be hiding within its narrow shelter ; but all that she found there was a confused heap of dead leaves. Yet her search within the tree was not wholly fruitless ; for the ground was clearly marked by the same impressions of sabots, and among the leaves there was a tiny bundle of plucked grass, smeared with red stains, which seemed to indicate that Ruth had been here since her encounter with Andros Aylmer, and that she had used the tuft of grass upon which to cleanse her blood-stained hand ; as indeed she had.

Judging by the position of this tree in its relation to the copse, Perrotine decided that Ruth had been making direct for Beau Desert, and, bidding Hubert put out the lantern light and thus save the oil, she had led him toward the farm.

The homestead was in darkness, and the yapping bark of Bijou, the little spaniel, and the lowing of a cow in the shippen were the only signs of wakefulness. Hubert had gone round to the side of the house and climbed up to Ruth's window, as he had done once before, and had tapped at the casement repeatedly, but there was no response. Whilst he was still there, Perrotine had gone to the kitchen door and boldly knocked at it. From above the door a window had

opened and Guida Halkett's nightcapped head had looked out, and Guida had called forth in a cautious whisper :

"Is't you, Ruth ? Is't you, dear heart, come home after all ?"

Perrotine had made no response. The question itself had told what she most desired to know, and, waiting but a few moments until the window was again closed, she had crept quietly away to join Hubert where he was waiting for her at the corner by the stillroom.

They decided that it was useless to search among the outhouses ; for, if Ruth was not within the house itself it was not likely that she would be upon the premises at all. Perrotine, indeed, had not seriously expected that Ruth would return to Beau Desert, and her failure to find her here, or any trace of her presence, only confirmed her first conviction that after what had happened Ruth Aylmer had resolved never again to go back to the farm.

"I do believe 'twill turn out exactly as Sir George predicted," she said to Hubert. "We shall find her in the Sea Wolf's Cave. For it seems that when my brother last spoke with her, at her window, and asked her whither she would go to hide herself, were she a fugitive from justice like Andros Aylmer, she replied (and he repeated to me her very words) : ' In such a case one might find many a less goodly refuge than the Sea Wolf's Cave.' But 'tis a far cry from here, and I do trust that you are prepared for a long and weary walk, and that you are not afraid of the darkness."

Lord Debenham had signified his willingness to walk the length or breadth of Jersey, or even all round the island, if need were, and as to being afraid of the darkness, "Am I not accustomed to pacing a



ship's deck in the midnight watch?" he reminded her.

The Sea Wolf's Cave was on the wild north coast of the island, opening out from the cliffs of Mourier Bay and approached by tortuous passages difficult to discover even in broad daylight; and long before they had entered it, Perrotine had decided that it was most unlikely that Ruth had travelled so far to take refuge in its loneliness, where there was no possibility of finding food. Nevertheless, they carefully explored the vast chambers, flashing their lantern-light from side to side, searching in every cranny and corner far to its uttermost extremity, full five-score fathoms inward from its mouth; calling Ruth's name again and again, getting no response but the hollow echoes of their own cries. And at last they had come away weary and despairing.

On the homeward journey, as in going, they had diligently searched for signs of the missing girl, but without avail. Then, when at length they arrived tired and hopeless within near sight of Mont Orgueil Castle, Perrotine had suggested as a last resource that they should pursue their way a little further to the Pixie's Cave in Grouville Bay. And now they were beside it, lighting their lantern anew, with its fresh supply of oil which they had wisely taken with them.

Perrotine took the lantern in hand and clambered over the rocks to the narrow cleft in the cliff which marked the cave's entrance, and she led Hubert within, just as she had led the Prince of Wales, only that now the bright beam of the lamp revealed all the points and angles of the rocky walls and the unevenness of the floor. Here, sheltered from the wind, the lantern burned steadily, and in the silence, away from the murmur of the sea, they could hear each other's slightest whispers.

"Have a care that you strike not your head," Perrotine cautioned her companion, taking his hand. She led him far inward to where, beyond a deep pool, the rough boulders gave place to rounded stones and shingle, and where the cave opened out into a side chamber shelving upward. Into this inner chamber Perrotine flashed her light, and Hubert felt her hand suddenly tighten upon his own as she gave a startled cry and drew backward.

The shaft of light trembled in response to the agitation which shook her in every limb.

"See!" she exclaimed. But she had no need to direct his attention to what the light revealed, for Lord Debenham had seen as quickly as she. There in front of them, within the circle of light that was shed upon her, lay Ruth Aylmer, peacefully asleep; and what impressed them both was not the mere fact that at last they had found what they had so painfully sought, so much as the astonishing beauty of the sleeping figure upon which their eyes rested.

She lay at her full length upon her back, with her ankles crossed, her feet still encased in her little wooden sabots. In contrast with her black frock, her bare throat and her lovely face looked exceedingly white and waxen. Even her closed lips looked pale and her heavy eyelids and shining lashes seemed to tell that she had been weeping. For pillow she had made a coil of her long golden hair, from which her little black cap with its white lace edging had fallen backward. Her left arm lay across her gently heaving bosom, the sleeve drawn upward to the elbow, and midway between the elbow and the wrist was neatly bound a white napkin, deeply stained with blood.

Perrotine pointed to this bandage with its bright splash of colour but spoke no word.

“ ’Tis the wound that was meant for His Highness,” whispered Hubert.

Perrotine moved nearer to the sleeping girl, and, as she did so, she saw that Ruth’s right arm was extended from her side and lay protectingly across an open basket, about whose handle her fingers were tightly clasped. Within the rim of the basket could be seen a loaf of bread, some eggs, the broken blade of a dagger, a silver whistle, and a bedraggled bunch of violets and primroses. These, as it seemed, represented all her worldly possessions and her entire stock of food. There was something inexpressibly pathetic in the clasp of the hand that closely guarded them, even in sleep.

All these little details the two intruders silently and reverently observed ; but their eyes lingered longest upon the sleeper’s beautiful marble face and upon the vivid crimson stain on her wounded arm. Neither spoke, but each knew what was in the other’s mind. They were both thankful that they had found her at last ; both gazed upon her with the same feeling of admiration and pity ; both had the same sense that there was something almost sacred and saintly in the girl’s innocent unconsciousness. It was as though they had entered a church, where no words might be uttered but the words of beatitude and prayer. This feeling that they were in a place of devotion was implied by the circumstance that young Lord Debenham instinctively removed his hat and reverently crossed himself.

They were very silent, hardly even daring to breathe lest they should disturb her. But, as Perrotine moved cautiously aside, the bright beam of her lantern was for a moment concentrated upon the sleeper’s face. Ruth sighed, her lips opened, the dimples quivered in her cheeks ; then very suddenly she raised

herself to a sitting position, clutching at the basket and staring about her with wide, dilated eyes.

"Who are you?" she cried, for in the glare of the light in front of them she could not see their faces. Then, as if in fear of them, she stammered agitatedly: "No, no. I will not go home—never—never again!"

"Ruth! Ruth!" Perrotine spoke very gently. "Fear not. We are here to help you. No harm shall come to you. Dost not know me?"

"Ah, 'tis Ma'm'selle Perrotine!" Ruth told herself, growing calm, yet still clinging tenaciously to the basket. "Why came you here to seek me? Can I not be left alone?"

"We have come to take you back with us to Mont Orgueil Castle, where we will give you a home, where you shall be well and tenderly cared for," said Perrotine.

Ruth stood up. Her wounded arm seemed to pain her, for she held it stiffly across her breast, the blood-stained fingers clinging for support to a fold of her bodice. She shook her head sadly.

"Pardon, Ma'm'selle," she murmured. "'Tis good—'tis very good of you to think of me in my distress, and I do most truly thank you. 'Tis true that I am homeless. Homeless in very deed; and yet not more so than the dear fowls of the air who are still my friends. I am not wholly destitute nor despairing; for the good God who knoweth all things hath not forsaken me. And while He giveth His care to the little birds, will He not also give it unto me?"

"Doubtless," assented Perrotine. "But 'tis not meet that a maid like you should wander homeless, and make her bed in a cold and desolate place like this. And where will you get food? Sure, you'll come with us? You'll not refuse?"

Again Ruth shook her head.

"Ma'm'selle, I am well content to be as I am," she said. "If I have abandoned what was my home, 'tis my own doing, and I will bear the consequences of my own acts. I seek not charity from anyone, and will not take it."

Her pride was as an impregnable wall against which the assaults of persuasion seemed hopelessly unequal.

"Charity?" Perrotine repeated. "Who spoke of charity?"—she remembered her brother's warning. "'Tis not in charity I'd have you come, but in love and equal friendship."

Ruth drew a deep, uneven breath and turned to pick up her basket.

"'Tis not for you and yours to think of friendship, much less of love, for a poor and worthless peasant," she rejoined firmly. "Prithee, what think you would be my condition, brought up as I have been, ignorant of your ways, and schooled in servitude? Think you that I could bear to be under the same roof with you, who have known only the luxuries and refinements of life—you, who are the daily companion of lords and princes? Name it as you may, Ma'm'selle, 'tis still a charity that you offer me."

"Oh, no!" protested Perrotine, putting forth imploring hands.

Lord Debenham moved to Ruth's side.

"Permit me, Mistress Ruth, to carry your basket for you," he said.

She drew it from him, looking confused, and laid her free hand upon the loaf. Until this moment she appeared scarcely to have realised his presence; but now she turned to him inquiringly.

"Tell me, Master Hubert—my Lord, I mean. Tell me, I beseech you, was Andros Aylmer arrested to-day, what time the troopers followed in his pursuit?"



Hubert shook his head.

"Alack, the rascal's still at large," he answered her; "or was when we came forth from the castle in search of you. I perceive to my regret that you escaped not from him without serious injury," he added, touching her arm very gently with the point of a finger.

"'Tis but a scar," she told him, although even at that moment the wound was throbbing with a pain that she could ill bear. "'Twill mend without help of surgeon. Still at large, is he? Ah, then His Royal Highness is not yet out of danger. I had thought that his capture was certain; but no fox is more wily."

She glanced from him to Perrotine and then toward the lamp which was now rested on a table of rock, whence its yellow rays shed a meagre light about the cave.

"I had been waiting until the sun should rise," she said. "But now, with the help of this lantern-light, mayhap——"

She paused and put down the basket at her feet, taking out the loaf very carefully so that she might not break any of the eggs. Perrotine watched her wonderingly. Ruth held the loaf in the crook of her unwounded arm.

"Y'are both to be trusted," she went on, much to their amazement. "Therefore I will confide in you, and enlist your help in solving the mystery of this loaf that I hold. 'Twas made by Lilette Aylmer, who bade me take it with these eggs to Mont Orgueil Castle, to the end that it might be delivered into the hands of David Bandinel. But I disobeyed."

Perrotine and Hubert exchanged understanding glances.

"I disobeyed," continued Ruth, "wilfully neglecting to deliver it, for the good reason that I believed it to contain a secret and treasonable message. I know not what the message may be, or if indeed there be one of any consequence ; as you see, I have not disclosed it, nor could I do so without light wherewith to read what is writ. But now, so please you both, we will break open the loaf and see."

Perrotine took off her cloak and spread it upon the stones of the floor, kneeling upon it and holding the lantern in position, while Ruth passed the loaf to Hubert, instructing him to break it and make search.

He began by tearing off the top crust and then busily scrambling with his fingers in the softer bread, eagerly watched by the two girls. Very soon his search was rewarded.

"Ah !" he cried, with boyish satisfaction, drawing forth a tiny roll of white linen. "What have we here ?"

Having cleared it of its outer coat of bread-crumbs, he was passing it to Ruth, but she bade him give it to Perrotine, while she herself gathered the scattered crumbs, with the remains of the loaf, and put them carefully away among the eggs in her basket.

Perrotine dexterously unrolled the linen and found within it a tightly folded sheet of paper—the fly-leaf of a printed book—upon which, as she straightened it out upon her knee, she discovered several closely packed lines of neat, small writing.

"*Certes*," she observed, "I was not aware that Madame Aylmer had command of such scholarship ! Her manuscript is 'most as legible as print ! 'Tis writ in good English, too," she announced. "A cunning precaution against its having fallen by chance

into the hands of one of our Jersey soldiers, who would never have understood it. And 'tis assuredly intended for the Dean himself, albeit I see not his name."

"Doth it savour of treason?" questioned Hubert, holding the lamp to illumine the written page.

Perrotine ran her searching eyes along the lines.

"'Tis surely treason," she answered, going down upon her elbows and holding the letter closer to the light. "*Par Madé*, I should think so! 'Tis providential that it reached not its intended destination. Ruth, I do most devoutly commend your discretion, as will Sir George when he's informed of the good work you have done in intercepting so seditious a communication."

"I pray you read it," urged Hubert.

"Not in my hearing, I beg of you," protested Ruth. "For 'tis no concern of mine, and I wish not to be encumbered with anybody's political secrets. If 'tis treason, I am content to know that I have frustrated its delivery. There is no reason that I should listen."

"Nay, but 'tis important that you should hear," Perrotine looked up to say. "I beg you to attend to my reading."

It occupied her a considerable time to decipher what Lilette Aylmer had written, for the names were indicated only by initials and asterisks; but having interpreted them to her own satisfaction Perrotine spoke them as she read:

*"Reverend Sir,—Seizing this secret opportunity to present a few lines unto you, I take the boldness to let you know how our affairs go since your unfortunate detention, and to supplement the word which my good man conveyed unto you in the onion. And first to inform you that the*

*business you wot of in Elizabeth Castle hath been duly completed by your appointed agent, Nick Nethersole, who performed his work as you designed.*

*"Things are not well with us, wanting the advantage of your personal advice and directions. Young George de Carteret exhibits a most inconvenient activity, and is proving a teasing thorn in our flesh. But you may rest assured that, despite his watchfulness, no chance will be neglected to effect your speedy return to us. Major Lydcott, who is now in safe hiding, hath laid his plans with all circumspection for your deliverance, and I believe you will suddenly hear more of them. Watch unremittingly for our signals, I beseech you, that you may be ready to act when the proper moment arrives for your escape. Trust none but those who are personally known to you, or who come with undeniable credentials, and above all things place no further confidence in Corporal Sicklesmith, who is a broken reed.*

*"I am to inform you, as I do with sorrow, that our good friends Benjamin Bisson and Henri Dumaresque have been no less unfortunate than yourself and James, for that they are presently confined under lock and key in another place.*

*"Doubtless it hath already come to your knowledge by our earlier letter, if not from other sources, that the Pr. of Wales hath taken up his abode in your most immediate neighbourhood, where he is being secretly entertained under the assumed name of John Merryman, or Merry something else. It hath been reported by certain of our friends in the garrison that his brother the Duke of York is in his close company, but his companion hath since been recognised as the harmless sprig of a lesser aristocracy, and a pampered favourite of George de Carteret's, one Lord Debenham to wit; while we have information that the little Duke of York is still under the protection of my Lord of Northumberland, whence it seems impossible to steal him.*

*"None the less, it is expedient for the furtherance of*

*the plans of General Oliver Cromwell that your neighbour, the said Pr. of Wales, should have his wings well clipped, and we are desirous that your reverence should recommend an easy and safe means whereby the clipping may be performed ; or that you should do it upon your own account, should opportunity occur. His room you will find marked 17<sup>bis</sup> upon the plan. It should be accessible to you should you fortune to find your door at any time unlocked.*

*"I pray you keep us acquainted as heretofore with your condition, and fail not immediately to look for messages in all things entering within your reach.*

*"I have no more to trouble you with but, praying for you, rest your reverence's humble obedient servant,*

*"L. A."*

Perrotine de Carteret looked from one to the other of her two companions, the while she folded the letter.

"Treason?" exclaimed Lord Debenham rising. "My faith, I should think so! Treason of the rankest kind! And the sooner the thing is handed to Sir George de Carteret the better. Let us not delay!"

"Nay," protested Ruth, "'twere safer far to destroy it at once—to burn it in your lamp. Sure, you can carry its purport in your memories."

"I fear me my brother would not be content with such unsubstantial evidence," Perrotine objected. "No, we will take the letter. You shall hand it unto him yourself. For, late though it is, I question not that he will be sitting up, impatiently awaiting our return. Yes, you yourself shall give it him, and receive his gratitude from his own lips."

Ruth drew back, and rose awkwardly to her feet.

"Is it not enough, then, that I should have been disobedient, without adding to my offence by acting



the part of a despicable spy and informer?" she cried. "You are expecting too much, Ma'm'selle. What think you that Andros Aylmer and his wife would do to me were I openly to betray them? Methinks I have done enough. And for the present I will remain here where you found me."

"But you will accompany us?" persisted Perrotine.

Ruth shook her head even more resolutely than before.

"If Sir George de Carteret is in Mont Orgueil Castle, which I had not known, then am I the more determined not to go with you," she said. "And I beg you to leave me."

Perrotine signed to Hubert to go aside from them. He turned away and crept beyond the circle of light. The two girls stood face to face in the full radiance.

"Ruth—dear Ruth," Perrotine murmured softly, "art thou indeed resolved?"

Ruth was breathing heavily, her sensitive nostrils quivering. Her large violet eyes looked very dark in the paleness of her beautiful face, about which her loose hair glinted like a cascade of ruddy gold.

"Yea, verily I am," she answered sadly.

Perrotine regarded her now in the recollection of her brother's praise of her; and she began to realise with fuller insight all that he had meant. Impulsively, yet timidly, she put her arm round Ruth's neck and drew her gently toward her, kissing her upon the lips with a fervour which surprised even herself. It was such a kiss as Ruth Aylmer had never before known in all her life; such a kiss as none could bestow who did not mean it to convey a message of tender sympathy and ardent love.

"Dear Ruth," Perrotine reiterated, still keeping her arm about the girl's neck, "wilt thou not believe

that 'tis for love of thee—that 'tis because I want thee, that I beseech thee to come ? ”

Tears had sprung into Ruth's eyes. She could bear an injury with fortitude ; she could endure pain without flinching ; harsh treatment and bitter blame left her unmoved ; but a word of tenderness or a caress caused the deep wells of her heart to overflow and her eyes to fill with moisture.

“ For love of me ? ” she echoed huskily. “ I scarcely know what that means. No one hath ever spoken to me so before, or wanted me for myself, in the same way that I have wanted the birds and the flowers.”

“ I'll love you always,” pursued Perrotine, “ as others will. My brother George—'twas he who sent me forth to find you, vowing that he could not rest until he knew that you were safe. He bade me find you and bring you to him to make your home in the castle and to live with us as our friend and equal, which you are ; that he might see you and worship you always. For he, too, doth love you, even more than I. And to have his strong and manly love should surely make you happy,” she went on, not knowing that with every word that she spoke she was making it more and more difficult for Ruth to comply. “ Had I a man's love such as his for you, sure, I'd be the happiest maid in all the world, and there is nothing that I would not do for his dear sake.”

She ceased, seeing that Ruth had closed her eyes and was shrinking as if in bodily pain, though the pain was mental rather than physical.

“ Ah, 'tis your wounded arm that's hurting you ! ” Perrotine cried. “ Come ! Rachel shall dress it for you. She is skilled in surgery.”

Ruth recovered herself then and, brushing the tears from her eyes, stood back.

“Go !” she said urgently. “Go ! Give him the letter, and quickly. For even now, while you delay, the Prince may be in danger, the prisoners may be escaping ! Think not of me, but go. For, though you stay till daylight, I shall not come. . . . Good night. And God rest you always !”

Perrotine saw that she was obdurate. And, seeing it, she determined to go back at once and bring her brother George himself to fetch her.

“Good night, then,” she said, kissing the girl again. “I will leave my cloak with you, but take the lantern. Good night.”

She called to Hubert, and together they quitted the cave.

When they were gone, Ruth crept unsteadily to the place where she had slept, and flung herself down upon the cold, bare rock and wept and wept as she had never wept in all her life before.

Less than an hour afterward, Perrotine returned, and with her Sir George de Carteret. Each bore a lighted lantern. They entered the cave and found the cloak lying neatly folded upon a boulder, and on the top of it was a bunch of faded violets—Ruth’s most precious possession ; but of Ruth herself and her basket there was no sign.

## CHAPTER XXI

“ KILMENY, KILMENY, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ? ”

EARLY on the following morning, when she had lighted the kitchen fire, Guida put on her sabots and went into the farmyard before going to the pastures to bring in the milch cows. This last was usually Ruth's work ; but Guida had already discovered that Ruth had not come home, as she had hoped the girl might have done, unknown to her, in the middle of the night. She had been upstairs to waken her, and, receiving no answer to her banging upon the door with the flat of her hand, had entered the room to find it without an occupant.

“ Just as I might have foreseen,” complained Guida, “ she has gone off again on that mysterious sunbeam to caress the moon's face at the edge of the world ! And this time I warrant me she has overbalanced herself and fallen off into space. 'Tis a pity that the good fairy she told me of hadn't touched her with her wand into something other than a thistledown. Had she turned her into an obedient, industrious kitchenmaid 'twould have been vastly more useful. But, then, there is no accounting for the fancies of fairies, and for my own part I grieve not that they have never touched me withal, and I covet not the caresses of any moon, or of anyone save 'Tony Sicklesmith.’ ”

She went first to the pigstye to look over at a

motherly sow and her new farrow of turbulent infants; next to the stables, to give good morning to the ploughmen harnessing their horses; then to the henhouse, to gather the fresh eggs and liberate the fowls and chickens. Returning by the side of the house, she heard Madame Aylmer's window open and a voice call aloud in imperative inquiry:

“Guida! Guida! Hath Ruth returned?”

Guida did not answer immediately, for her attention had been attracted by the sight of a basket lying conspicuously on the front doorstep. She went up to it and took it by its handle. It seemed to be empty but for a layer of soft hay. She carried it with her as she went back to respond to the impatient calls of her mistress.

“Guida! Dost hear me? Hath Ruth come home?”

Lillette Aylmer was leaning out over the windowledge, still wearing her sleeping robes and her enormous knitted nightcap.

“Nay, not she,” Guida now answered. “But here is her basket, all wet with dew, that I’ve just discovered on the doorstep, where she seems to have left it.”

“Seems? Why, who else would have deposited it there? She could scarce have done otherwise than leave it; for she couldn’t have got within the house, seeing that I had locked all the doors against her. She is richly served, though, having been kept out all night. ’Twill teach her a good lesson, I warrant; the disobedient baggage!”

“Sooth, now that I think on’t, I heard her knocking at the kitchen door in the very dead of night,” said Guida.

“She e’en attempted to enter by her own chamber window, climbing up by the ivy,” added Lillette with a chuckle. “For I heard her trying to open it;



though that, too, was fastened, you may be sure. I suspect you'll find her lying among the swine, or else in the woodshed. You can let her return to her duties, Guida. I'll forgive her her naughtiness, since, after all, 'tis clear that she duly delivered the contents of the basket, as I intended. Is't empty, prithee?"

"Empty as a blown egg," returned Guida, shaking it as well as she might without endangering her bowl of fresh eggs. "And yet!—Nay, 'tis not empty!"

She turned it over, and there dropped from it, as well as the hay, the long blade and broken handle of a dagger.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed the dairymaid in consternation. "A dagger, as I live! And broken in twain—a most unlucky omen! Wherever did the child pick it up? Ah! 'tis Colonel Aylmer's—the self-same one that used to hang above the parlour sideboard!"

"Impossible!" cried Lilette. "It cannot be that Andros has lost it! Though 'tis true he took it with him when he left us so abruptly yestermorn. Bring it within. And when Ruth chooses to return, as she no doubt will ere breakfast, bid her come here to me, and I will question her roundly."

But Ruth did not choose to return, and Madame Aylmer waited to question her in vain. She had disappeared; and it was many, many days ere again she crossed the threshold of Beau Desert farmstead.

Nor was Madame Aylmer alone in her perplexity. Perrotine de Carteret was equally perplexed, and even more deeply distressed.

On that same morning Perrotine had returned to the Pixie's Cave. She was later than she had intended to be, but after her long tramping and her anxious night she had slept heavily, and there had

been a delay in getting ready the warm food and the various tempting dainties which she had brought with her. If Ruth declined for her own personal reasons to take refuge in Mont Orgueil, she at least would not be so obstinate as to refuse to accept these creature comforts. To Perrotine's dismay, however, Ruth was not within the cave. Perhaps she had wakened early and gone down to the sea to wash herself and dress her wounded arm, or she might have gone inland to some stream to get a drink of water. In any case, her absence could only be temporary.

Searching about the cave, Perrotine satisfied herself that the girl had returned during the night to finish her sleep, and had only lately gone out again ; for she found the hollow shell of an egg which Ruth seemed to have eaten raw, sucking its nourishment through holes pierced in its ends. The empty shell could hardly have been overlooked, she decided, when she and Sir George had been here a few hours before. But it remained the only sign of Ruth's recent presence.

Leaving the food in a conspicuous place within the cave's entrance, where, without help of lantern, it could not fail to be seen in its wrapping of a clean white napkin, Perrotine went out and searched along the shore ; then climbed by the cliff path and looked all ways from the prominence of the high land beside the mill. But Ruth was nowhere to be seen. She would have waited longer but that this was the day of Sir Philip de Carteret's funeral and she had to ride with the other mourners to St. Heliers ; so she went back into Mont Orgueil, trusting that Ruth would find the food before it was quite cold, and would understand.

In the late afternoon it was Lord Debenham,

instead of Perrotine, who went to the cave. He had brought no lantern, but none was needed, for, on looking within, he saw that the food had been taken from the napkin, which he now replaced with another containing some newly made cakes, together with a flagon of milk and some grapes.

As he was about to leave, a sound reached him from the far recesses of the cave. Was Ruth coming out to him? He stood very still and the sound ceased. He did not know that it was only the echo of his own movements on the loose stones. Since the food had been taken, was it not clear that Ruth was there?

On the next day the same process was repeated, only that the proffered provisions were of an even more tempting sort, and were accompanied by such additional requisites as a hair comb, a piece of soap, a towel and a soft pillow. Had Perrotine been certain that the attention would have been accepted, and if the entrance had been wide enough, she would have gone so far as to furnish the cavern with a couch to lie upon, and to bring into it such accessories as a hanging lamp, a mirror, and curtains, and to have made it like a room. But she respected Ruth's very evident desire to be left to her own devices, as well as her proud wish to remain free from indebtedness; and so she was careful to leave only for the girl's acceptance some of the bare necessities of life. Little did she imagine that even these small attentions were being received and enjoyed by some one other than Ruth! Little did she suppose that while food in plenty was being placed here so thoughtfully and so regularly, Ruth Aylmer was never coming anywhere near to the Pixie's Cave!

Because the food was being removed and the flagon duly emptied, both Perrotine and Hubert were

content to believe that it was Ruth who was receiving the benefit of the needful nourishment. Because Ruth did not choose to let herself be seen, or to leave some token—even a daisy or a wild violet—to show that she was thankful, Perrotine concluded that it was only an evidence of the girl's peculiar pride and bashfulness ; pride which shrank from openly acknowledging a favour ; bashfulness which deterred her from revealing herself as the recipient of charity. Excepting the mere fact that the food was being taken as often as it was brought, there was no conclusive sign that it was Ruth Aylmer who was inhabiting the cavern. But how could there be any doubt that it was she, when the very existence of the cave was known to hardly more than a score of the islanders and remembered by fewer still ?

It is true that upon more than one occasion Perrotine provided herself with a lighted lantern and explored the cave's inner recesses ; but the only unexpected discovery that she made was the insignificant one that the pillow had been placed on a level shelf of rock nearer to the entrance than the far side chamber where Ruth had been found asleep on the first night.

Hubert was less easily satisfied than was Perrotine, and, prompted by boyish curiosity, he even took the pillow out to the open air and examined it closely in the sunshine, watched by Perrotine.

“ Had it been Ruth's fair head which reclined upon this,” he remarked, doubtingly, “ I should have expected to find that she had left one of her golden hairs behind ; but I see none here. Haply she is not in the habit of moulting,” he smiled. “ But could we find the comb that you brought her, surely we should discover some in that, and so set our minds at rest ; for no one in all Jersey has hair like hers.”

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Perrotine. "What are you driving at? Do you suppose that our food has been devoured by the pixies?"

"Nay, I suppose naught so unlikely," he answered her. "But, as you know, Sir George has become uneasy, or he would never have been at the pains to send Isaac Wincall all the way from Elizabeth Castle to inquire. 'Twill disturb him yet more when he hears that we have never set eyes upon Ruth during all this time while we have been ministering unto her. And I should not wonder if he were himself to come and set some one to stand on watch until the girl reveal herself in the flesh. Faith, I'll do it myself to-night! I'll lie in wait with my eyes fixed upon the cave's entrance, nor draw them away for any man ere I have seen her living self!"

"But wherefore this sudden doubt?" cried Perrotine in amazement.

Hubert looked at her curiously for a moment.

"Come, and I'll show you what has aroused my suspicions," he said, leading her back into the cave.

Within the entrance he went aside and picked up something white from a cranny where he had hidden it.

"'Tis but a harmless slice of bread, spread with butter, with a bite taken out of it," he explained. "I entreat you to examine the bite," he went on, holding the piece of bread toward her on the palm of his hand. "Dost see the marks of the teeth, clearly defined upon the edge, where the butter is thickest? I vow they are not Ruth Aylmer's teeth, for hers are small and even and dainty; whereas these are big and crooked and coarse, and one at the front is broken!"

Perrotine bent her keen scrutiny upon the marks.



“ In very sooth 'tis so,” she acknowledged, betraying her apprehension. “ I do not understand. Who else than Ruth can have been living in the cave? Is't possible that she has a companion ? ”

“ Nay,” Hubert was prompt to answer, “ if she has not been here alone, then I'll warrant she has not been here at all, and that we have been diligently feeding a stranger.”

“ A stranger? But whom ? ”

Hubert shook his head.

“ I know not. How should I know—I, who am myself a stranger? And yet——” He broke off abruptly, glancing at her sharply as he clutched at her sleeve. “ What of the man who swam ashore from *The Bramble*? Could it be he ? ”

Three mornings before, Christopher Bowden's frigate had dropped anchor in Grouville Bay as one of the guard ships which Sir George de Carteret had stationed round the island. She had hardly swung round to her cable when a musket had been fired from her forecastle and a boat launched. A deserter was swimming shoreward. But he was already close to the beach when his escape was noticed, and, ere the boat had been pulled a dozen strokes, he had clambered upon the rocks.

“ Could it be he ? ” Hubert repeated.

Perrotine's answer came quick and decisive.

“ No,” she said, “ though your conjecture is not surprising, since the swimmer was none other than Martin Aylmer. But upon coming ashore he ran off at once to Beau Desert, where he has been openly living ever since, no one troubling to arrest him.”

“ Then where is Ruth ? ” questioned Hubert.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE WANDERER

“WHERE, then, is Ruth?”

Even at the moment when Debenham was asking that question, Ruth was wandering aimlessly about the island, a hungry, homeless waif, living almost as a primitive savage, dependent, like the birds and the wild creatures of the woods, upon her own exertions to find food, and upon chance for a shelter. Perrotine de Carteret had spoken truly enough when she had said that Ruth need not be destitute, for there were many homes in Jersey whose doors would have been willingly opened to her. But Ruth was too proud to acknowledge her want, or to cast herself upon the pity of the islanders, and she sought the solitudes where no houses were.

So great was her pride, and so deep-rooted her spirit of independence, that she had even refused to partake of the remains of Lilette Aylmer's loaf, and had given the crumbs to the friendly sparrows. She had so far compounded with her sensitive conscience as to eat the half-dozen fresh eggs rather than suffer them to be wasted, although she had not been able to cook them, and must needs imbibe their nourishment raw. She wondered if it was honest to eat them; but she could hardly have returned them to Beau Desert, since to do so would have betrayed that she had ignored her errand, and to appropriate them to her

own use could not be considered a serious sin in view of the fact that many of the hens that had laid them were regarded as her own property. With the basket itself it was different. It belonged exclusively to Lilette Aylmer, and must be restored to her. So Ruth had taken it to the homestead and left it on the doorstep, where she knew it would be found.

And having left it, she had gone her ways, consoling herself with the reflection that she was entering upon her life of freedom owing nothing to anyone. For a little while, she was distressed in realising that even for the very clothes which covered her she was indebted to Lilette Aylmer, whose money had paid at least for the material ; but she argued that she had surely earned them by her past work, that she had fashioned them with her own hands, every stitch in them being of her own doing ; and, then, had not George de Carteret informed her that long ago, when she had been a little nameless foundling and Andros Aylmer had carried her to his home, she had been fully clothed ? It was true that she was indebted to her foster-parents for her upbringing during her young girlhood, and for her education, and that perhaps she still owed them some duty ; but, regarding the situation in all its aspects, she reasoned that the balance of indebtedness was even.

This was merely the material side of the question. On its spiritual side there was no room to argue. Not for a moment did she hesitate in her determination to cut herself off from the Aylmer household.

And now she was leaving it, empty handed ; possessing nothing in the world but the simple clothes and the poor little wooden sabots that she stood in, as she looked back through the darkness at the house that had been her home—nothing but these and the

little silver whistle which young Lord Debenham had given to her as a keepsake. In her room upstairs, whose casement she could dimly see by the misty light of the clouded moon, there were many little treasures which she had called her own—the lace collar which she had been making and had nearly finished ; her work-basket and all its contents of needles and cotton and thread silk ; the little carved ivory casket which she had found among some wreckage on the beach ; her prayer-book and her copy of *Morte d'Arthur* with all its stories of the knights of the Round Table. These she was abandoning, as she was abandoning her friends of the farmyard : the hens and chickens, the ducks and turkeys, and Sally the sow, and the plough horses.

Very slowly and sadly she turned away, not knowing whither she was going ; determined only on one thing—that she would not go back to the Pixie's Cave, where Perrotine de Carteret was sure to return, perhaps even with Sir George to add his pleadings that she should go into Mont Orgueil Castle to live upon their charity. She almost regretted now that she had not brought Perrotine's warm cloak away with her. It was only an old cloak, and Perrotine, as she knew, had many better, and would willingly have spared it. It would have been useful now, for her frock was thin and the night was cold, and a damp mist was blowing in from the sea. Already her hair was wet and had lost its crispness, and her skirt was heavy with moisture from the long grass of the pasture into which she had strayed. She shivered, thinking that it would have been much better if she had been allowed to continue her sleep in the cave, where there was no cold wind, and where she could at least have remained dry. There were other caves, many others ; but they were farther away,

and by the time she could reach any one of them the day would be breaking.

While she was wondering where she should go, she had come into the midst of the cows, slumbering in a silent group in the lee of the plantation. She stood still, trying in the darkness to distinguish one from another. Sophia she knew by the ragged white patch on her side ; Sophia was not a Jersey cow, but had come over from Normandy. She knew Bertha by the fact that her calf was beside her ; and Marie because, as always, she lay unsociably apart from the rest. One of them coughed, and that was surely Henriette, who was always husky. Ruth made a peculiar cooing sound as she approached, and those that were awake knew her and did not allow themselves to be disturbed, aware that it was not yet milking time.

Still cooing, she went nearer, and even threaded her way among them as through a lane. Their warm, sweet smell was in the air. Their presence was companionable. She recognised each of them now. She was standing quite near to Priscilla's raised head. She went down on her knees and scratched the docile animal behind the roots of the curved horns. Priscilla, seeming to like this, lowered her head across an outstretched foreleg, and went to sleep. Then Ruth, afraid of wakening her, crept back behind her shoulders into the sheltering bay of her warm body, and herself lay down with her cheek against Priscilla's soft velvet side, and there she soon fell into a sound sleep.

She did not know how long she slept, but she remembered afterward having dreamt that she was on board a great ship, sailing very quickly toward a land shining with gold ; and it seemed to be the ship striking violently upon that glistening land which wakened her with such terrible suddenness.



In reality, however, it was the fact of Priscilla scrambling to her feet, thus removing the pillow and letting Ruth's head and shoulders fall back in sharp concussion with the solid earth.

The eastern sky was aglow with a pink aurora. Along the ground there drifted a sea of white mist, from which the trees and hedges rose like spectres and the cattle moved with their limbs hidden to the knees. Ruth stood up and shivered. Her frock was wet with dew, her face and hands were clammy, her feet were cold, but her wounded arm was hot and throbbing and painful. Instinctively she felt in her bosom for the three remaining eggs that she carried there. Fortunately they were not broken, and she could count upon having them for her breakfast. She wondered if she might get some milk from one of the cows. Would it be stealing? she asked herself. But her doubts were decided by the fact that she had no pail or vessel of any sort in which to receive the milk. So she walked away out of the pasture land, caring not whither she went, but only wishing to bring warmth into her body, and to get as far away as possible from the neighbourhood of Beau Desert.

She had walked westward for about a mile when she came to a stream, and here she refreshed herself with a drink of the clear water and by laving her face in its coldness. Then she sat on the stream's bank and unwrapped the bandage from her arm. This was more difficult than she had expected it to be, for the napkin was stiff with the hardened blood, and the arm was swollen and inflamed. She held it in the stream, and at last the ugly wound was disclosed, looking black and deep, far from being merely a scar as she had described it. She bore the sight of it bravely, as she bore the pain; and having cleansed

it and washed out the napkin, she carefully bound it up anew.

By this time, the sun had risen, and was dispersing the mist. The birds were singing, the daisies and primroses were smiling in the light, and all the world was awake. Ruth said a grace and took up one of her three eggs, which she had placed for security within a little mossy hollow. She pierced its two ends with a thorn and drew forth its liquid contents with her lips. When she had emptied the first one, she ate some watercress and the fresh young buds of hawthorn leaves which she had gathered. Perhaps she was improvident, but she was also hungry, and she ate all three of the eggs, and considered that she had made a very good breakfast.

Her arm was paining her less now, and the sun and the food had warmed her. She was almost happy ; and, remembering that it was a Sunday morning, she stood up and repeated a Psalm, choosing one which seemed to her to be appropriate to the occasion, as surely it could not have been more so :

“The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. . . .”

She wondered for a moment if she ought not to go to church, even though she had not combed her hair and wore her sabots instead of clean shoes, and had on only a crushed and damp dress and no newly starched cap or collar. She had not missed going as long as she could remember ; but then she had always been able to appear with clean hands and a shining face ; and she felt now that she could not

brook being looked at so unworthily appalled, while the dread of Lilette Aylmer assailing her with angry words and ordering her to return to her duties weighed in her decision to absent herself for once.

Later in the same morning, she stood on the high ground beside Hogue Bie, and watched the solemn cavalcade from Mont Orgueil riding toward St. Helier's to attend the funeral of Sir Philip de Carteret. She saw Sir George, dressed in black, astride his black charger, with the Prince of Wales at his side, followed by Lancelot and Perrotine and Lady de Carteret, Lord Debenham, Captain Legge, and some soldiers of the garrison ; and she knelt, murmuring a prayer, as the procession passed. None observed her, and, when they had gone out of sight beyond the trees, she entered the ancient Druid temple of Hogue Bie, which was like a cave built of giant stones overgrown with moss and lichen, and here in this old world place of pagan worship she spent most of the day in her loneliness, taking no food, for there was none to be found. Here, too, she slept throughout the night, although it was less comfortable a resting-place than the shielding warmth of Priscilla's side.

Next day, a plover's egg was all the food that she ate, and she wandered many miles in search of it. She went even as far as the Sea Wolf's Cave in the hope of finding some edible sea weed or some shell-fish ; but the tide was full in, the rocks were covered, and it would be dusk before they were again left bare. On her way back toward Hogue Bie, she passed a little cottage, whose door stood open. She glanced within and saw that there was no one there. The widow Fautrart, whose cottage it was, had gone out to the field to milk her cow and had left a plateful

of bread and butter on the table. Ruth was exceedingly hungry, and she might easily have taken some of the food, or else waited until Goad Fautrart came in and then asked for some, with the certainty that it would not be refused, for she had often done little services for Goad and her children, whom she had noticed a few moments before weeding the turnips. But to beg was as bad as to steal, and she felt ashamed to reveal her poverty ; so she passed on, conscious that she had never been so painfully hungry before.

Late in the evening from her chosen hiding-place in the Druid's temple she heard footsteps afar off. She peered out and saw a man walking slowly along the horse-track towards Gorey village, and presently he began to sing a stanza of the forecastle ditty she had heard once before :

“ I ’llows this crazy hull o’mine  
At sea has had its share ;  
Marooned three times an’ wounded nine  
An’ blowed up in the air.  
But ere to Execution Bay  
The winds these bones do blow,  
I’ll drink an’ fight what’s left away,  
Yo ho, with the rum below.”

She knew that it was Isaac Wincall, the earless quartermaster of *The Eagle* ; but what she did not know was that he was out searching for her, by Captain de Carteret’s orders, and that he chanted a stave of his ditty so that, if she should chance to hear him, she might know that he was a friend who would help her. But she did not heed him.

Others were searching for her, but none came so near to her as Isaac Wincall, and Perrotine de Carteret still believed that she was regularly taking the dainty food left for her in the Pixie’s Cave.

For four days Ruth wandered without once exchanging a word with a human soul. Her wounded arm was becoming worse for want of proper attention. She could not dress it skilfully herself with only one hand, and the bandage was becoming unclean. But the pain was hardly less difficult to bear than the gnawing pangs of hunger. The search for food was becoming the one object of her life. She could not rest ; she could not sleep. Her head ached. Her lips were parched ; her throat was dry and sore. She knew that she was becoming haggard of face, and she believed herself to be positively unsightly. Her hair was unkempt, her cap and collar were crushed and dirty, her frock and stockings were torn by the brambles, and one of her wooden sabots was split in the sole, so that it pinched her foot as she walked and made a painful blister which caused her to limp.

The more woebegone she became, the greater was her reluctance to let herself be seen. She would hardly dare to enter the meanest inhabited hovel, even though her hunger impelled her to do so. How different at present was her state from what it had been on George de Carteret's ship, when she had slept in the cabin furnished for a prince and dressed herself in front of the beautiful mirror ! She was thankful that she could not see her reflection in that mirror now ; thankful that George de Carteret could not see her. If he were to do so, would he still say that her eyes were beautiful as the sea ? Would he still say what Perrotine had told her that he had said—that he loved her—he, the richest, and she the poorest ?

At the very thought of the impossibility, the tears sprang to her eyes and rolled down her pallid cheeks, leaving long streaks in the grime that had gathered upon them. Oh, she was very, very miserable ; and



so, so hungry ! The Psalm which she had repeated had said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." But she wanted very much now, and she was almost tempted to believe that the Shepherd had forgotten the most needy of His flock. The birds of the air could find food in plenty, but she could find none ; not without killing or stealing. Once, in her seclusion of the Druid's temple, a rabbit had nestled under her hand. She could have killed it with the mere pressure of her fingers ; but, instead, she only kissed it between its soft large eyes and let it go free. She could have gone into any hen-roost and stolen a few eggs, or into any farm steading where the winter store of turnips was not yet exhausted, and there was no home in all Jersey, save one, where she might not have entered boldly and got all that she most needed without lowering her pride to beg. For no one looking at her and seeing her wan, pinched face and sad, wistful eyes could for an instant doubt of what it was that she was in want, and they would surely have given it unasked.

At last in her desperation she determined that if she could not get food otherwise, she must steal ; and if from anywhere, then from Beau Desert Farm. She thought that her sin would be mitigated if the theft were from her former home, where she still had some claim. And if she were caught in the act and dragged back to her deserted duties, then she would yield. For she had come to see that one cannot live wholly alone in this world without recognising one's duty to others. But if she were not discovered, then she might even repeat the offence, and at the least she would have appeased the torment of her hunger.

It was a drink of new milk that she craved for, more than all else. And so, in the early afternoon

of the fifth day of her solitary wanderings, she made her difficult, limping way to the pastures of Beau Desert, carrying with her a cracked earthen cup which she had found in a ditch. She crawled through a gap in the surrounding hedge. Most of her friends of the herd were lying in the shade, chewing the cud, but one of them was standing meditatively near, and Ruth called her. "Coo-oo-coo!" she called.

There was something very sad and weak in her voice, but Priscilla knew her and strode nearer, swishing her long tail against her fallow sides, and stepping daintily as a hind, so clean and graceful and delicately coloured that Ruth was impressed as never before with her favourite's beauty.

The cow stood patiently still. Ruth went to her side and crouched down. Now at last she would have the long-wished-for drink of the richest milk in all Jersey, and it would act like some magical potion to renew her strength and send the young blood coursing again through her sluggish veins! The anticipation was almost a joy. But alas! it was a joy to be broken by a swift and bitter disappointment. Not until this moment, when she tried, had Ruth realised that to milk a cow, and at the same time hold the cup, she would require the use of her two hands. And her left hand was utterly powerless! She tried, and again tried, but all in vain. Not a drop of milk could she secure.

What cruel fate was pursuing her? Was she in very deed forsaken? It seemed a mockery now to say "I shall not want."

"No, no, Priscilla dear," she moaned pathetically as the cow turned her handsome dark face round and directed her soft eyes upon her in gentle inquiry, "'tis not thy fault, but my misfortune, and thou must e'en wait for Guida."

It was very evident that she must now go back to the farm and own herself a penitent. All her rebelliousness had gone from her, all her pride had given place to an abject humility. There was no other course open to her ; she must go submissively back to her thralldom and dream no more of liberty and independence.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### WITH CLASH OF STEEL

SHE had braced her mind to the resolve before she reached the gate. It required all her courage again to face Lilette Aylmer and admit defeat, but there was no alternative course for her to pursue, and she must endure her martyrdom with what stoic bravery she might. At the gate she hesitated, with her hand on the wooden latch. A horseman was riding along the lane, and, not wishing to be seen by him, whoever he might be, she waited until he should have passed. But instead of passing he drew to an abrupt halt in front of her. Ruth started back with a cry in which there was no note of pleasure, but only of cold surprise.

“Martin !”

From his greater height in the saddle, Martin Aylmer looked down upon her in genuine astonishment.

“’Tis surely Ruth !” he exclaimed, reining in his restless horse. “Yet might I well be excused for not knowing you on the instant. Marry, but you are vastly changed ! What has come over you, girl ? Where have you been to bring yourself to such a woeful pass ? I’ll be sworn you have not been in prison ; and yet you look for all the world as if you had just come forth from a dungeon !”

Ruth regarded him with indifference. He, too, was altered, but in a different way. He had had his

hair cropped very short and he wore the sombre attire of a Puritan.

"You are ill, I can see," he said with some show of sympathy for her condition. "You'd best ride the rest of the journey, and I'll walk." He slid down from his seat and, still holding the bridle, stepped to the gate and stood facing her with his hand on the top rail. "'Twas folly in mother to suppose that you were being entertained in Mont Orgueil Castle," he went on. "She might well have known that you would have no dealings with the godless Royalists. I told her so."

Ruth wished that he would leave her. Somehow her determination to return to the farmstead was growing momentarily less firm now that she knew that Martin was at home.

"Nay, I have not been within the gates of Mont Orgueil," she told him faintly.

He took her words to imply that she was denying all sympathy with the Royalist cause. He himself was making no disguise of his adherence to the Roundheads, and believing that Ruth was equally at enmity against the King, he was keeping no guard upon his tongue.

"*Ma fé*, no," he resumed. "You have more sense than to ally yourself with such a lot, and 'tis plain to see that you have not been lying upon a bed of roses, or living upon the fat of the land. Thou'rt ill, surely!"

"In sooth I am," Ruth admitted, "as you would be, too, had you been without food so long as I."

He looked at her sharply.

"Without food? Then what of the dainties that you have so secretly and regularly deposited within the Pixie's Cave?" he asked her in amazement.



She raised her plaintive eyes to him questioningly.

"Dainties?" she echoed, hollowly. "I know not what you mean."

"What?" he exclaimed, bewildered. "Is it not you, after all, who have been making daily visits to the cave?"

He caught impulsively at her wrist. It was the wrist of her wounded arm, which she had rested on the bar of the gate. She screamed aloud with the sudden pain, and his horse, startled by the scream, reared back and plunged off down the lane.

Leaving Ruth where she stood clinging for support to the gate, Martin ran in pursuit of the madly careering animal.

"Food in the Pixie's Cave?" Ruth's brain was whirling. What had he meant? She could not comprehend.

Recovering herself, she drew away from the gate, without having opened it. If there was food to be had in any other place in all the world she would not now go back to Beau Desert Farm. She turned her gaze eastward. Yes, she would go to the Pixie's Cave and see for herself what he had meant. She blamed herself for having wandered as she had done in the futile belief that food would be found wherever her footsteps might take her. All her proud disdain of charity had been useless and empty, and it would have been better far if she had meekly accepted the proffered help of Perrotine de Carteret.

A new strength seemed to buoy her up as she decided to go back to the cavern. Perhaps it was already too late for her to hope that Perrotine would seek for her there any more, as she had done on that first night; but it was possible that Perrotine had caused some food to be left there. Ruth did not ask herself how Martin Aylmer could have discovered

that anyone had been making daily visits to the cave, or what he had meant by his mysterious reference to dainties. The mere faint but alluring chance of finding a few crumbs of food within the cavern was the one overwhelming idea that engrossed her aching, throbbing brain, and she did not pause to reason about anything else.

Setting her face to the eastward, she started off in the direction of Grouville Common with faltering footsteps, feeling exceedingly weak, and often stumbling in the ruts of the uneven ground. Her broken sabot hurt her, and she decided that she could go better without it ; so, at the edge of the same dingle where she had gathered her posy of violets, she halted and bared her feet, throwing away her worn out wooden shoes and her ragged stockings. Lest she should be met by anyone in crossing the high road, she essayed to make her hair more tidy, to straighten her little cap and to make her collar lie flat about her neck and shoulders. But she met no one, and she hastened onward, hardly knowing the reason of her haste, apart from the hope of finding a morsel of food.

Never before had that journey seemed so long. But at last she got beyond Gorey Mill and to the edge of the cliff, and her hopes rose high. The tide was full out, revealing the wilderness of rocks and the black timbers of the wrecked frigate. If there should be no food in the cave, she knew where she could find some young oysters, which she believed were good to eat, though she had never yet dared to eat one.

The rough stones of the cliff path were sharp for her bare feet, which were less hardened than they used to be when she had been accustomed to running about without shoes or stockings. When she came

upon the smaller stones of the shingle she ran ; nor stopped until she had come to the mouth of the cave. Breathing deeply, agitatedly, without glancing to right or left, not knowing that she was being watched, she entered, holding her wounded arm close against her breast to protect it from injury. She was still within the area of reflected sunlight when her glad eyes rested upon a flagon, and she saw that it contained milk.

“ God be thanked ! ” she murmured as she caught at it firmly in her right hand. She felt that the milk was warm to her touch. She raised the flagon to her lips, and drank. While she drank, the words were echoing in her brain : “ The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” She had now got what she wanted. She paused to take breath, and, as she did so, she caught sight of a white napkin, folded and tied over something bulky. Still holding the flagon, she went down on her knees beside it. Then, finishing the milk, she unfastened the loose knot and clutched at a slice of white bread spread thick with butter and discs of hard-boiled egg.

She had taken one ravenous bite—the first solid food that had passed her lips for five long hungry days—when she was startled by heavy footsteps scrambling toward her from within the cave, accompanied by the sinister sound of a sword clinking against the rock floor.

“ Ah ! So I have caught you at last ! ” came the threatening voice of Andros Aylmer.

Ruth sprang to her feet and staggered to the open air ; but just as she was escaping through the narrow mouth of the cave, he snatched at her, seizing her by her wounded arm. She screamed aloud, partly from nervous fright, but more because of the sharp pang of pain which his fierce grip caused her. She

had broken free from him, but her brain reeled, and she fell forward. A strong arm caught her in its embrace, arresting her fall. She was lifted from her feet and flung bodily over a man's shoulder, supported there by his arm and hand. She could not see his face. She did not know who he was, and she was too dazed, too weak and frightened to think. All she knew was that she was safe in the protection of his strength, and that with his free right hand he had drawn his sword.

As he moved to carry her away, or else to take up a firmer footing upon the flat rock, she saw Andros Aylmer emerge from the cave, struggling awkwardly through its narrow opening. Her rescuer turned and faced him. She heard the clash of steel on steel, and while their weapons scraped together and tinkled, she felt herself being slowly, tenderly lowered to her feet, until she stood with his arm about her waist. She freed herself from its clasp and stood back, panting, forcing herself to forget the stinging, palpitating pain in her arm. His back was toward her ; but she knew him now : knew his tall, manly figure and his long, wavy, dark brown hair. Who else could it have been but Sir George de Carteret ?

The two men were fighting desperately now. Ruth knew—she had often been told—that they were the two most skilful swordsmen in the Channel Islands ; and seeing their blades flashing in the sunlight, seeing their supple bodies move forward and backward to the cunning thrust and dexterous parry, she could not doubt that they meant to carry on their duel until one of them should be disabled or dead, and a great terror came upon her lest that one should be George de Carteret. Instinctively, not knowing why she did so, she snatched at her whistle, which hung from a lanyard about her neck,



and putting it to her lips blew a long, trembling blast that must have been heard even from the battlements of Mont Orgueil Castle.

She could do no more than this. To have thrown herself betwixt the two combatants would have been a fatal mistake, as she well knew, and it was safer to let the result depend upon George de Carteret's skill in defence.

The table of rock upon which they fought was very small, hardly allowing them room to draw back from each other beyond the reach of their extended weapons. Ruth's heart was in her mouth as she watched their swift movements, as she heard their blades scraping and clashing. Neither spoke a word. There was no sound but the shuffling of their feet upon the rock and the metallic clinking of their swords. They drew never apart; each watched the other's eye which seemed to tell him how the wrist would turn and the arm shoot forth. Each sought for an opening for the fatal thrust, but each was ready with his guard at the crucial instant: neither seemed to gain an advantage.

The sound of their heavy breathing was presently added to the ringing clash of steel. For one long, pulsating moment they stood almost motionless, each with his feet apart, his body bent forward, his left hand upheld and his right stretched outward, their blades trembling one against the other in unison with the imperceptible trembling of wrist and forearm. Even in that moment of desperate tension, Ruth noticed how their knuckles showed white in the redness of their hands. Suddenly Andros Aylmer lunged forward, and there was a shrill little screech as his blade slid across his opponent's firmly interposed weapon. His foot slipped on a crushed limpet as he drew back to



recover himself ; he swayed, but managed to regain his balance.

They traversed now, sparring as it were, to renew the attack, and Aylmer's face came into the sunlight, as George de Carteret's had hitherto been. Ruth saw a thin trickle of blood on de Carteret's sun-tanned neck, and, as their weapons again crossed, his arm seemed to be less sure of its cunning ; while, as if at the sight of the red drops, Andros Aylmer appeared to have become more terrible in his onslaught. Their swords were ringing loudly now. The air was filled with the glitter of bright steel, and George de Carteret was being pressed, inch by inch, backward to the edge of the rock. Was he growing faint ? Ruth feared so, and again she blew her whistle and called aloud, "*Haro ! Haro !*" Her own strength was failing her.

A strange giddiness came over her, and the sun and the rocks and the duelling men with their flashing swords went round and round in a wild, mad whirl. Her knees gave way under her, and she sank slowly until her hot face splashed into a pool of sea water. But the cold salt water revived her, and she sat up, dimly conscious of the shouts of many voices and the tramping of hurried feet.

The two combatants were still fending, feinting, thrusting, parrying, lunging and guarding. Truly they were well matched. Yet Andros Aylmer's breath was coming in short, sharp gasps, while George de Carteret had taken on a new energy, and had pressed his opponent to the very verge of the rock. With a quick glance aside at the approaching men, Aylmer flung himself forward in a desperate effort to end the fight, and suddenly Ruth saw his flashing sword fly singing into the air to fall with a ringing clash among the rocks many yards away. At the

same time George de Carteret's blade seemed somehow to have got entangled in his antagonist's brown cloth doublet. Then Andros Aylmer faltered, lost his balance and, wheeling round, fell flat on his back, his hands lying limp at his sides and his eyes staring fixedly upward to the drifting white clouds.





THE TWO MEN WERE FIGHTING DESPERATELY NOW

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE CROWNING TOUCH

WHEN Ruth returned fully to consciousness and opened her eyes to her strange surroundings, she found that she was lying upon a comfortable couch before a bright wood fire in a great oak-panelled room whose latticed windows, set high in the castle's thick walls, admitted the slanting rays of the evening sun. Her head, which was being supported by a soft hand, was still aching dully, and her wounded arm was very sore ; but her lips and tongue were no longer parched, and the gnawing pains of her hunger were less severe.

Some one was bending over her, feeding her from a cup of warm beef-tea, which was surely the most delicious, life-giving food that she had ever tasted. She had been sipping it mechanically, almost as in a dream ; but its warm nourishment was already sending her blood racing through her veins, bringing a tinge of colour into her wan cheeks and a light into her heavy eyes. She looked upward now, and saw that the cup was held by Perrotine de Carteret.

" You are very good, Ma'm'selle," she murmured in gratitude. " How shall I thank you ? "

Perrotine smiled down at her and passed the empty cup to Rachel, who stood near her.

" You are feeling better now," she said.

" How long have I been ill ? " Ruth faintly asked ; for it seemed many, many days since she had fallen



into George de Carteret's arms in her flight from the Pixie's Cave.

"Nay, I know not," Perrotine answered gently. "You have been here barely a half-hour. But you are marvellously hungry. Wilt have more of the soup?"

"Gladly, if I may," was Ruth's childishly submissive response. She was troubled no more by scruples against accepting charity, for she knew that it was by George de Carteret's wish that she was here; that indeed it was he who had carried her within the castle and laid her upon this soft couch. Vaguely at first, but now more vividly, she recalled how, when the desperate duel was at an end—the duel which he had fought for her sake—his first act had been to drop his sword and run to her side and put his trembling arms about her, lifting her and breathing her name and fondling her, as a mother would fondle her child that had been lost and providentially restored to her.

She had fainted from bodily weakness, and his voice had seemed to come to her from a far distance, mingling with the murmur of the waves, and she had only been dimly aware of what he was doing and saying. Even now she could not remember his words. She only knew that they had been full of a great tenderness and solicitude, and that while he was ministering to her immediate needs he was paying no heed to his own wound, from which the red drops were trickling slowly across his white lace collar and down the breast of his black velvet doublet.

She had not had the strength to protest, or his will had been greater than hers. Others had protested. She remembered some of the men who had answered her call coming to his side and offering their help.

His brother Lancelot had offered to bear her to the castle ; but, declaring that none should carry her but himself, Sir George had bidden the men look to their wounded prisoner and see that he was conveyed at once into the fortress.

It was by reason of this command that Ruth understood that Andros Aylmer was not fatally hurt, but only disabled. She did not yet ask herself how he had happened to be within the cave, and it was not until afterward that she learned that he had made its recesses his refuge, and that all the time, while she had been wandering homeless and suffering the agonies of starvation, he had been enjoying the luxuries intended for herself.

Rachel brought forward the replenished cup.

“ Goodness gracious,” she muttered in amazement as she saw how Ruth’s hungry eyes followed its passage to her lips, “ a body would think that the child had been fasting for days ! ”

“ When did you last eat ? ” Perrotine inquired, withholding the cup while she paused for an answer.

Ruth bent her brows to reflect upon the measure of time.

“ ’Tis well upon five days, when I ate of a plover’s egg,” she replied, and as she spoke there was a heavy moan from close behind her and George de Carteret stepped silently to her side.

“ Five days without food ! ” he said in a deep tone of pity. “ And those on the top of the days of detention imposed by Lilette Aylmer ! Body o’ me ! I wonder thou’rt still alive ! ”

Ruth turned at sound of his voice, the while she attempted to conceal her naked, unwashed feet beneath her torn skirt. She gave a little cry of dismay, seeing that he had not yet attended to the wound on his neck.

It was a long score in the skin, extending from throat to ear, and it had been made by the edge of Aylmer's sword, whose point, swiftly deflected, had been aimed at a more vital spot. He carried a long strip of white linen and an ewer of hot water. At a sign from him, Rachel brought a sponge and a basin, into which he poured some of the water. Ruth wondered what he was about to do. But presently she understood when he sat beside her and gently took hold of her bandaged arm.

She as gently drew it from him, looking confused.

"No," she protested, blushing. "Not until you have seen to your own hurts shall you touch mine."

He looked at her reprovingly and saw tears in her eyes.

"But if I insist?" he pursued, again laying his hand on her swollen wrist.

She knew that it was not in her power to thwart his intention. His very presence impelled her to submission, and she meekly yielded to him.

"Then I beseech you to be quick," she urged in a choking voice, glancing furtively at the red stains upon his collar.

Very tenderly he stripped her arm of the sullied cloth with which she had clumsily bound it. The hardened under layer was clinging obstinately to the inflamed skin and the clotted wound, and he bathed it with the warm water, making it soft and pliable. She did not flinch, though the pain was very great, even from her shoulder to the tips of her livid fingers.

"Dear heart!" he exclaimed in compassion, when at last he uncovered the unsightly wound. "And thou hast had this to endure, as well as the hunger and the weariness! Ah, poor child."

"Nay, I implore you, pity me not," she bravely

responded. "Sure, 'twas in a good cause that I bore it. Better that the stab is where it is than in some one else's heart!"

He nodded, comprehending.

"As in a very sooth it might have been, hadst thou not intervened to save him. Ay, thou art right," he added, with a forced laugh. "I will not pity thee."

In reality his pity for her was filling his heart to overflowing, but he tried to hide it, well understanding her unconquerable pride.

When he had thoroughly cleansed the wound, he dressed it with some fine powder of burnt seaweed, which Rachel had recommended as a cure, and then very neatly he bound up the arm with the linen bandage, watched by Lady de Carteret, who praised his skill, and endeavoured afterward to emulate it in attending to his own less serious wound.

It was the long abstinence from food that had weakened Ruth more than the combined effects of her injury, her weary, anxious wanderings and her lack of restful sleep; and even already she was feeling the restorative influence of the nourishing beef-tea with which Perrotine had been feeding her. And with the appeasement of her ravenous hunger, and the removal of her anxieties, the strain upon her nerves was relaxed, the throbbing in her forehead gradually subsided; even her arm was becoming less painful, and she would have been almost comfortable but for the weight of sleepiness which was coming over her. All that she desired now was to be allowed to sleep, undisturbed, and as long as she might. George de Carteret was ready to carry her to the room which she was to occupy; but she declined his assistance, and was satisfied to go up the wide staircase with no other help than the support of Perrotine's arm about her waist.

As the two girls walked along the sunlit corridor, Ruth still with bare feet, still with her hands and face unwashed, and her hair in disorder, one of the doors opened in advance of them and the Prince of Wales and young Lord Debenham came forth. Ruth drew back, ashamed to be seen looking so woefully disreputable. But it was too late for her to escape, and there was no doorway or alcove where she could hide until they should have passed.

Nervously agitated, she could only hope that the Prince would not notice her, that he would pass by her as he had passed by Guida Halkett on the draw-bridge. She saw that he was dressed, not as a plain soldier of the garrison, but with studied elegance, in a costume of rich grey velvet, trimmed with silver and white. Were he setting out to attend an audience at the Court of St. James's he could not have been more splendidly arrayed, she thought; while for herself she was as ragged and untidy as the most forlorn mendicant who ever begged for alms at the roadside. Surely he would not so lower his princely dignity as to pay any regard to a creature so very far beneath him!

But her estimate of him was mistaken, as she quickly perceived. For on the instant, as he caught sight of the golden gleam of her rough uncovered hair in the rosy sunlight that fell upon her through the west window by which she had paused, his face brightened and he strode toward her with hands extended in greeting.

She bent her head, trembling as she dropped an awkward curtsy, trying once again to conceal her naked feet beneath her creased and bedraggled skirt.

He bowed to her very graciously.

"Nay, 'tis I who ought to humiliate myself,



not you," he said, while his eyes rested curiously upon her bandaged arm, held close against her bosom. "For I am your eternal debtor, who can never hope to repay you for the pain that you have borne on my behalf."

He took her right hand in his own. She raised her languid eyes and glanced at him bashfully from under her long, flickering lashes.

"What I have borne, sir, is naught to the pain I am enduring at this moment at the thought of Your Royal Highness seeing me in my poverty," she murmured apologetically.

"Poverty, forsooth!" he smiled. "What care I for your poverty? With a true heart like yours, you can never be poor. And were you clothed in garments of gold, I'd not think more of you than I do now, with your tattered frock and your pretty bare feet." She swayed unsteadily. "But you are ill," he added in gentle sympathy, "I will not detain you. Prithee, let me conduct you to your door."

He put his arm about her and she walked between him and Perrotine. At the door he bade her good night, and, as he went down the staircase, he turned to his companion, who followed at his heels.

"Hubert," he said, "wouldst please me?"

"What would be your pleasure, sir?" Hubert inquired.

"Why," returned the Prince, "'twould please me mightily if your lordship could contrive to furnish Mademoiselle Ruth with a goodly wardrobe. Thou'rt rich, and hast a pretty taste in dress, withal."

Hubert nodded in appreciation of the suggestion.

"If I deemed it likely that she'd accept such a gift," he said, "sure, she should have the goodliest clothes that London can supply. But I fear me that my money would be but thrown away; for I have

already discovered that she will accept favours from no one saving only Sir George de Carteret, and that Sir George himself is as jealous that none else shall favour her. What would you ? ”

“ Thou rogue ! ” exclaimed the Prince in playful reproach. “ Thou hast been spying upon our good host ! ”

“ Marry,” laughed Hubert, “ but there has been no need to spy, for ’tis plain to see that he is over head and ears in love with her. Why else, think you, would he preserve and cherish so closely the bunch of violets that she left within the cave ? ”

“ By my faith,” muttered the Prince, “ if that be so, I’ll make him an admiral, and if he can so carefully treasure a few faded flowers, he shall e’en be Treasurer of the Royal Navy ! ”

The room which Ruth Aylmer occupied was one of the best in all the castle, chosen because it was well removed from the disturbing sounds of the soldiers’ quarters, and because, from its embayed windows, she could look out through a frame of ivy upon both sea and land. Before helping her to climb into the large four-posted bed, Rachel and Perrotine washed her, combed out her dishevelled hair, and ministered to all her needs as if she had been a very princess and they her servants ; and if she objected that they were too kind to her, Perrotine always met her objections with the assurance, “ Sir George hath ordained it,” whereupon Ruth became submissive as a little child

They watched her in turns while she slept, and never did she sleep so soundly and peacefully, or with such refreshment ; for when she awoke, late in the morning, her headache was gone, her lips had regained their redness, her eyes their sparkle, and her bodily weakness seemed to have given place to all her former

vitality. But her cheeks were still pale and haggard, and her hair had lost some of its lustre. She wished to get up ; but Lady de Carteret, who came in to see her, bringing her a fresh bunch of cowslips and a message from the Prince, advised her to remain in bed.

Lady de Carteret sat with her for a long time during that first morning, gathering, little by little, such information as Ruth was willing to give her concerning Andros and Lilette Aylmer and their intrigues. She spoke of the letter sent in the loaf, and commended Ruth's wisdom in intercepting it. Ruth could not help her in the matter of discovering the method by which Lilette Aylmer or her agents were supposed to be exchanging communications with the imprisoned Dean : but whatever it might be, her ladyship declared that it was now effectually frustrated, the Bandinels having been removed to a different cell, higher up in the tower, beyond all reach of possible messengers who might climb upward by the ivy.

"You can see the barred window of the room that he and his son are now in, if you lean forward," said Lady de Carteret, pointing it out to Ruth.

"And what of Andros Aylmer?" Ruth ventured to inquire. "Is he also imprisoned in the Harliston Tower?"

"Yes, but at the farther side, in the room beneath," her ladyship informed her.

"Then he is not sorely wounded?"

Lady de Carteret shook her head.

"Would that he had been," she said vindictively. "I fear me he will recover. Another foe would have been less merciful than was my son, who might easily have thrust his sword's point a little farther, and so rid the world of one who will now die a less

honourable death. Tell me, child—for you witnessed the encounter from beginning to end and marked each several thrust and parry—how fared Sir George in his swordsmanship withal, and how befell it that he escaped not without that sorry scratch upon his neck ? ”

Ruth was not equal to the task of giving a detailed account of the duel, and she excused herself.

“ Well, it matters not, since the result was favourable to us,” said her ladyship. “ But had I been a man in George’s place, I’d not have let the scoundrel off so easily.”

Ruth soon became strong enough to walk about her room, and well enough to be independent of nursing, beyond the periodical dressing of her arm. She might even have gone down to dinner on the third or fourth day of her convalescence : but when Perrotine proposed that she should do so, she quietly declined, and intimated that she would prefer that food should be sent up to her. She did not like to admit that her real reason of refusal lay in the ever present consciousness that she possessed no clothes in which she could appear before such company as she would have to face in the dining-hall.

This circumstance of itself had brought her to the decision that it was impossible she should ever yield to Lady de Carteret’s expressed wish that she should consider herself an honoured guest in Mont Orgueil Castle. It was true that she had left some good clothes behind her at Beau Desert Farm : clothes of which she would have no reason to be ashamed. But even if she should send for them, how could she expect that Lilette Aylmer would consent to give them up ?

Perrotine did not press her. Outwardly, neither she nor her mother nor Rachel seemed to realise

Ruth's difficulty. Nevertheless, they were so mindful of the girl's necessity that already they had engaged a dressmaker from St. Helier's who, with an assistant needlewoman, was busy in one of the lower rooms altering and adapting some of Perrotine's own best garments to the measure of Ruth's tattered frock, which they had taken during her sleep. And at length, one forenoon, Perrotine said :

"My brother George is about to depart for England in his ship, which is now ready to sail. And he bids me tell you that 'twould please him to see you at table to-day. Thou'lt come, of course?"

Ruth clutched at the chair in which she sat, and her face went very red.

"'Tis impossible," she faltered. "How could I appear, dressed as I am?" And she looked down at her feet, that were encased in a pair of knitted slippers, and at the borrowed cloak which served her as a gown.

"Tut, but I did not expect you to go down thus," laughed Perrotine, turning to go out of the room. "But if you will look within the oak chest at the bed-foot, there are some things that will fit you."

Left alone, and knowing that there remained little time in which to prepare herself, Ruth opened the heavy chest and found within it such clothes as she had never dreamed of wearing ; all neatly folded and ready to her hand in the order in which she needed them, and nothing lacking, even to a pair of silk stockings, beautifully clocked, and a pair of dainty, soft leather shoes with burnished silver buckles enlaced with violet silk bows. The beauty and rich simplicity of the gown of black velvet astonished her, and when she lifted it, there, beneath, was her own lace collar cleanly washed and pressed, and a



cap fashioned like her own, but of velvet instead of cloth, and trimmed with the lace which she herself had worked. She could not believe that the dress had not been especially made for her, so well did it fit her. Indeed, she had proof that this was so, for the left sleeve was so devised that she could put her wounded arm into it without hurt, and it was low and wide at the neck to suit the uncommon fullness of her throat.

Whilst she was fastening it, Perrotine returned, similarly dressed in all particulars, but that her collar was wider over her shoulders and that she had lace bands round her wrists. She stood back against the closed door in dumb admiration for some moments.

"Behold, thou art fair, my beloved," she cried. "Behold thou art fair ; and there is no spot in thee !"

"Does it fit me ?" Ruth asked, turning round and round to be inspected.

"Yea, to perfection," Perrotine declared. "And how elegant it makes you ! And your hair ! How it shineth ! 'Tis like a river of gold ! On with the collar. Ah, 'tis the crowning touch that maketh all complete. Now you are truly like a very queen of beauty !"

But Ruth shook her head and sighed sadly.

"I like it not," she said. "'Twill make me vain. 'Twill cause me to forget my lowly station. For, whatsoever raiments I wear, I must ever remember that I am but a poor farm maid, who ought even now to be back milking the cows and feeding the hens."

Lest she should continue in this strain, Perrotine hurried her out of the room and took her down the stairs and into the great reception-hall.

Ruth had expected that the company would consist only of Lady de Carteret and her two sons,

with the Prince and Lord Debenham ; and she was astonished and alarmed to discover that the room was crowded with courtiers, both women and men, all dressed in the finery of silk and lace and glittering jewels and military scarlet ; and all chattering busily in French and English. At the first she felt impelled to make a retreat, but Perrotine pressed her forward and thoughtfully led her round to a shadowed corner, assuring her in a whisper that she was as comely as any of the ladies present, and that she would hardly be noticed among so many. This was consoling, and gradually Ruth lost her nervous sense of inferiority and began quietly to look about her, wondering who all the people might be.

She saw the Prince standing as the centre of a group near the fire. His eyes were turned in her direction, and presently one of the ladies at his side turned also, as though he had been speaking of her, as indeed he had been. But what she was most deeply conscious of was the fact that George de Carteret had turned his back upon her, ignoring her presence, although she was sure that he had seen her as she entered. He was paying his earnest attention now to a very tall and handsome woman, dressed in white satin, who appeared to be listening with profound interest to what he was saying.

“Prithee, who is the lady in black conversing with His Royal Highness?” Ruth inquired of Perrotine.

“Oh, she’s a duchess,” Perrotine answered “—the Duchess of Northumberland, with whom his brother, the little Duke of York, hath lately been staying. You will see him presently take her in to dinner, for her grace is the lady of highest rank.”

“And the one in white to whom Sir George is so vastly attentive?” Ruth whispered. “What

gorgeous jewels she hath about her neck and hair ! And she is even more sweetly fair than the Duchess."

"Yes," nodded her companion. "'Tis Lord Debenham's mamma. I warrant my brother is singing the praises of Hubert ; who, after all, is a very nice boy."

"But wherefore are they all here in Jersey?" Ruth pursued.

"Marry, they're here as the Prince's retinue," Perrotine explained. "For now that His Highness hath no longer need to go about in disguise, 'tis proper that he should have his courtiers around him. And, furthermore, Jersey is at present a far goodlier refuge than England, where everything is in conflict and confusion." Ruth's gaze lingered upon the lady with whom Sir George was speaking.

"Lady Debenham is surprisingly beautiful," she murmured.

"She has been accounted the most beautiful woman at Court," Perrotine nodded. "But her name is not Debenham. She is the Countess of Eddington. Debenham is but the Earl's family name. See!" she exclaimed. "What is happening?"

What was happening was that the Prince of Wales had abandoned the Duchess and was now striding straight toward the shadowed corner where Perrotine and Ruth were sitting. The two girls both stood up at his approach and curtsied. But it was to Ruth that he spoke.

"I pray you give me the honour of taking you in to dinner," he said, considerately putting forth his left arm so that she might take it with her right hand.

Ruth gasped and became deathly pale. Every eye in the room was upon her. She swayed backward and would have fallen had not Perrotine's hand

supported her. What did it all mean? Was it possible—was she to believe it—that he, the Prince of Wales, the heir to the Throne, really meant her to take his arm and be escorted by him in front of all these lords and ladies—her who but a few days ago was an outcast, wandering homeless, hungry and ragged about the land?

Perrotine urged her forward. Mechanically she laid her hand upon his sleeve, and he led her through the double line of the other guests and into the banqueting hall, where he placed her at the long table in a chair at his right hand, where a beam of sunlight fell upon her golden hair and beautiful face and cast the shadow of her lashes over her deep violet eyes.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE ALARM IN THE NIGHT

LONG years afterward, when she was herself a great lady and one of the famous beauties of the Court of Charles the Second, Ruth remembered that first dinner in Mont Orgueil Castle. She remembered vividly with what trepidation she had borne the ordeal of sitting among so many strangers, knowing that she was the special object of their curious glances. She had felt extremely awkward and clumsy, not only on account of her lame arm, which was an obvious excuse for many of her deficiencies, but also because of her utter ignorance of what was expected of her on such an occasion. For once she was devoutly thankful to Lilette Aylmer, who had drilled her in table manners, albeit she could have wished that that same strict mentor had also taught her the art of conversation, instead of inculcating the virtues of a silent tongue.

Every one else was talking, but she was painfully bashful, and felt as if she could not utter a word, until the Prince turned to her from Lady de Carteret and tactfully spoke to her about the beauty of the Jersey cows ; whereupon Ruth drifted into telling him of all the varying characteristics of Priscilla and Henriette, Marie and Sophia and all the other cows who had been her friends at Beau Desert ; and admitting that she had slept in the pasture with her



head pillowed on Priscilla's side, she went on to give him a full account of her lonely wanderings in search of food, not knowing that others than he were listening and admiring the animation in her face, until suddenly she realised that hers was the only voice that was speaking, when she stopped abruptly, blushing in a confusion of modesty which made her more winningly beautiful than ever.

More than once during the dinner she had been conscious that Sir George de Carteret's eyes were fixed upon her, with the same sad, yearning look which had been in them when she was with him on his ship's quarterdeck, and when he had said: "Had I my wish, you should voyage with me to the last end of the world." And once, when he was looking at her thus, the lady sitting beside him, the lovely Countess of Eddington, had touched his arm, as if to awaken him from a dream. Ruth reflected that he had not spoken to her yet since the day of the duel, and that he had seemed even to avoid her. Nor did he come near her when the company, leaving the table, went into the reception-hall. But later, when many of the guests were going away, some to Elizabeth Castle, some to the ships, and others to the seignories, and Ruth was retiring to her room, he having watched her all the time, followed her up the stairs and overtook her in the corridor.

"Ruth," he faltered, "wilt thou not wish me good-bye?"

She trembled as he laid his hand upon her shoulder and looked down into her eyes—trembled like a frightened dove.

"Wherefore?" she asked in surprise. "You are not leaving us?"

"At once," he answered. "Even at this moment a boat is waiting at the sallyport to take me out to my

ship. Wilt think of me sometimes when I'm away ? ”

She bent her head.

“ In every hour, in every waking moment,” was her softly murmured response. Then she glanced up at him wistfully. “ But you will come back soon—before I go away ? ” she pleaded.

“ You shall never go away, unless I take you,” he said, very solemnly, “ and I'll come back all the speedier because you are here.” And with that he raised his two hands and, clasping them behind her neck, drew her to him and passionately pressed his warm, trembling lips upon each of her closed eyes in turn. “ God be with thee, dear heart,” he murmured.

“ And with thee,” she added, watching him as he strode away.

From her window she could not see the sallyport, but his ship's gilded poop was visible, glistening in the evening sunlight, and after a long time of patient waiting she at last saw his boat bearing outward, swept into fuller view by the ebbing tide. She saw him climbing to the deck, followed by Hubert and the men, and then, as the breeze from the land caught her sails, the great vessel disappeared.

Ruth still sat at the casement, hoping that she might again see the ship, and while she watched, her eyes travelled idly about the walls of the Harliston Tower, and she thought almost with pity of Andros Aylmer, lying in his dungeon, whilst she whom he had beaten and oppressed had been sitting side by side with the Heir to the Throne. And as this thought of the contrast was passing through her mind, her eyes still lingering about the ivied tower, she suddenly drew back.

“ Strange ! ” she exclaimed.

“ What is strange ? That I should come unbidden within your room ? ”

It was Perrotine de Carteret who had entered silently and asked the question.

"Nay," returned Ruth. "Thou'rt always welcome. What I deemed strange was something which I have just beheld at the barred window of David Bandinel's cell. When I looked out in the early morning, I saw that there was something red tied about the middle bar, whereas now 'tis not red, but white."

"Marry, but I see naught to alarm you," smiled Perrotine. "Your own pretty cheeks, for example, have changed from red to white, and white to red, a full score of times to-day, and yet no earthquake has followed."

"None the less, my own changes of colour have betokened an agitation within," returned Ruth, "and Master Bandinel's signal can hardly be without meaning."

"Dost think, then, that 'tis the signal referred to in Madame Aylmer's letter?" Perrotine asked in sharp concern.

"Without a doubt," rejoined Ruth. "And, if I mistake not, 'tis intended as a message to say that Sir George has departed from the castle, and is therefore no longer to be feared."

"Well, no harm can come of it," Perrotine decided. "For, while the rebel leaders are all imprisoned and the island is again at peace, there can be no danger."

Ruth gave silent acquiescence to this pronouncement, but nevertheless resolved to watch for further signals.

During the ensuing night, the wind blowing strongly, she got up to close her window, and as she stood near it, became aware of a curious rasping sound which came to her from the direction of the Harliston Tower. She thought at first that it was some loose

gate swaying to and fro in the wind, or the chattering of some night bird ; but as she listened it came intermittently, ceasing for many moments when the wind was still, and continuing again with determined regularity. It was as though some person were at work with a saw or file upon a metallic substance. But remembering that the soldiers of the garrison were on duty at night as well as in the daytime, she returned to her bed and thought no more of it.

On the next night, however, when the weather was calm, the same mysterious sound was renewed, and she was almost certain that it was caused by a file rasping upon iron, and it still seemed to come from the direction of the Harliston Tower. In the morning, she reported her discovery to Lancelot de Carteret, but he received the intelligence with a smile of superiority, which effectually quieted her suspicions.

While Sir George de Carteret was absent, Ruth did not leave the precincts of the castle. The weather was wet and boisterous and she had no inducement to go beyond the gates. Even the Prince and his attendants seldom went abroad unless occasionally for a canter on horseback across the common in the forenoons, while Ruth herself and Perrotine occupied themselves with their lace pillows, or in helping Lady de Carteret in her domestic duties.

One morning when she was watching the changing of the guard in the castle yard, Ruth observed Corporal Sicklesmith standing near her. She went up to him.

"Hast seen aught of Guida of late, Tony?" she inquired.

"I e'en had speech with her yesternight, Ma'm'selle," he answered her. "And she bade me inform you that the cows do miss you most peevishly,



and that even the hens have become fitful in the laying of their eggs since you've been gone."

"She knows that I am here, then?"

"Marry, yes, and so, too, does Madame Aylmer, by the token that she sent a message."

"A message—to me? Sure I'd be more content if she would do me the favour of sending some of my personal possessions from my room. What was her message?"

Tony seemed to think the opportunity ripe, and he said:

"'Twas but a friendly request that you would be so good as to intercede with her ladyship, to the end that Colonel Aylmer may be permitted to see a doctor for his wound received in his late duel with Sir George."

"Then Madame Aylmer has received news of her husband's condition?" reflected Ruth in surprise. "That is passing strange. I had not myself heard that his condition was serious. But doubtless it has been duly reported to her ladyship, who may well be trusted to look after her own affairs without advice from the outside; and Madame Aylmer should be well aware that there is a doctor in the castle."

"Even so did I remind her," returned Corporal Sicklesmith. "But it seems that Colonel Aylmer is ill satisfied with the treatment of Dr. Herault, and would have one of his own choosing from the monastery of Maison Dieu."

"Ah, I perceive," nodded, Ruth, seeming to agree. "In that case, I will acquaint Lady de Carteret with Madame Aylmer's wishes."

She kept her word to the extent of speaking with Lady de Carteret on the subject, but at the same time made it very clear that she suspected Lilette Aylmer's motive to be the secret one of opening up



a direct communication with her husband. She even went so far as to warn her Ladyship of this possibility.

The warning, however, did not appear to be treated seriously, for about three days afterward Ruth made the discovery that a young doctor, wearing the monastic habit of a Benedictine friar, was making periodical visits, not only to Colonel Aylmer, but also to the cell occupied by David and James Bandinel. She saw him once walking in advance of her toward the doorway of the Harliston Tower, and was interested in him, partly on account of his monkish garb, and partly because of the extremely youthful swing of his figure as he walked. She did not see his face, this being hidden by his cowl.

In the meantime she observed that the signals from Bandinel's cell window had ceased to be displayed. The singular rasping sound which she had heard at night, however, continued ; but it was more subdued than before. She could almost have fancied that the mysterious worker had now adopted the caution of putting oil or grease upon his file, and her suspicions concerning the matter became more acute for the reason that she had ascertained beyond question that the sound came from the neighbourhood of Bandinel's cell window. Wherefore she spoke of it once again to Lancelot de Carteret, who now assured her that, as appointed constable of the fortress, he would make it his business to institute inquiries.

Somewhat more than a fortnight had gone by, and Sir George de Carteret did not return to Jersey. Christopher Bowden's frigate, which had been anchored off Mont Orgueil, had sailed away, and in its place there had come a strange, foreign-looking sloop, which no one in the castle seemed to know anything about. Lancelot averred that she was

merely a trading sloop taking shelter ; and the explanation was reasonable, for, on the evening of her arrival, a westerly gale was blowing and increasing to the proportions of a storm. The night was full of terrors.

So fiercely did the wind blow that Ruth became nervously alarmed for the safety of Sir George de Carteret. She could not sleep for thinking of his peril upon the sea, but got up from her bed and, wrapping herself in a warm cloak, paced restlessly up and down the dark room, or sat by the rain-swept window, listening to the wild roar of the waves and the reverberations of the thunder, watching the lightning flashing across the angry sea and illumining to a more than usually vivid green the shining wet ivy that covered the lower walls of the Harliston Tower. Surely, she thought, it must have been upon just such a night as this that *The Rainbow* came to grief on the Guillemot Reef !

In the midst of a bright flickering flash, while she was peering outward, she saw a white hand and arm thrust forth from the window of Bandinel's cell, and something was dropped from it. It seemed to her that the bars of the window had been removed, and instantly she had an explanation of the mysterious rasping sound which she had heard so often. The bars had been filed through until, while yet seeming to be intact, they had required only a strong wrench to sever them. And now, yes, she saw by the light of the next flash—they were gone, leaving an open yawning space through which any man might crawl. And from the lower coping there hung suspended a long rope.

“ Ah ! ” Ruth cried in quick comprehension.

She understood it all. The prisoners were about to escape. They had waited for this night of storm,

when the unsuspecting guards would be less vigilant. She must give the alarm, and at once, since none else had seen what was going forward.

She crossed to the mantelpiece where she kept her silver whistle, and, finding it, looped its lanyard about her neck. She did not wait to put on her slippers, but went out into the corridor in her bare feet. There was always an armed sentinel posted outside the Prince's door, which was but five beyond her own. He would help her by calling out the guard. She expected to see the light of his flambeau ; but, to her consternation, the corridor was in deep darkness, excepting only at its farther end, where a long, high lancet window revealed the lesser blackness of the sky, brightened now and again by the steely blue flicker of the lightning.

Where was the sentinel? Why was he not at his post?

Ruth felt her way by the wall, counting the doors as she passed. At the third she stopped abruptly as a blinding flash of lightning illumined the long passage with its vivid, trembling gleam. By its light she had seen a ghostly black human figure looming between her and the window, bending forward at the fifth door. She had seen that it was the figure of a man, and while the thunder crashed and rolled tumultuously she realised that he wore the habit of a Benedictine monk, with its black cowl drawn forward concealing his face.

Ruth drew back a step, undecided what to do, wondering only what Andros Aylmer's doctor wanted at the door of the Prince. In the silence which followed the thunder, she heard the intruder's fingers fumbling awkwardly with the door handle. She did not think he had knocked for permission to enter, and she knew that the key was always turned from the inside. He

could not be here on legitimate business at this hour of the night. Impulsively Ruth caught at her whistle ; but even as she raised it to her lips the door was pushed stealthily open, and in the same moment a flash of lightning, gleaming through the window within the room, shone upon the white face beneath the monk's hood, and she saw that it was the face of Martin Aylmer !

He had turned, startled at the shrill blast of her whistle. Even as he hesitated, still crouching by the open door, she ran forward and, flinging him upon his back, rushed past him into the room, still blowing her whistle.

Frustrated in his purpose, whatever it may have been, Martin Aylmer gathered himself together and ran off along the dark corridor, leaving a sword lying across the threshold.

The Prince, startled from his sleep, had leapt from his bed. Seeing that he was safe, Ruth hastened out again, shutting the door behind her, and turned in pursuit of the pretended friar. Dimly she saw his dark robed figure entering the stairway leading to the Harliston Tower. He could not escape from the castle by this way, she assured herself. He would certainly be caught. Already many of the doors had been flung open—Lancelot's, Perrotine's, Lady de Carteret's. And there was a noisy clatter of footsteps on the stone stairs leading up from the officer's quarters. One of the sentinels from below carried a flaming torch which Lancelot de Carteret snatched from him while calling upon the men to follow him.

For the next half-hour or so all was confusion and clamour. The alarm bell was set ringing, from the battlements muskets were fired ; and in the turmoil no one seemed clearly to know what had happened



and was happening ; Lancelot de Carteret least of all. For when he came downstairs it was to declare that no one had gone up in front of him, and to hazard the conjecture that the figure which Ruth affirmed she had seen must have been that of a mere ghostly apparition.

“*Mai grand doux*, hast thou looked within the cells ?” cried Lady de Carteret in indignation. “Or must I go and do it myself—dressed as I am, and unarmed ? Go, boy, and make a thorough search !”

His second search certainly did not lack thoroughness. Accompanied by Corporal Sicklesmith and a party of pikemen with lighted torches and drawn swords, he entered the cells, first Andros Aylmer’s, and then the Bandinel’s, but only to find them empty. The three prisoners had escaped, and with them the supposed monastic doctor, who had helped them by providing them with files wherewith to cut through the iron bars, and ropes wherewith to climb down by the outer walls.

Now that the birds had flown, it was abundantly clear how it had all been done, in spite of Ruth’s repeated warnings ; warnings which had been so blindly neglected. But even yet there might be time to recapture the fugitives ; or so Lancelot hoped.

“Yes,” agreed his mother, not very well pleased at his bungling, “if they be not already making their way out to the strange sloop that is anchored there waiting to receive them.”

The sloop was indeed their intended destination. Two of them were seen running down the beach, and shots were fired after them as they ran. It was too dark to see if a boat was there ready to be launched, and it was also too dark to distinguish which the two were. It could only be surmised who one of them was



by the fact that he had left a friar's black-hooded gown behind him on the barbican. Search was made for their companions, and they were found lying at the foot of the Harliston Tower, one, David Bandinel, quite dead ; the other, his son, dying. The cause of their failure was discovered in the condition of the rope. The younger man had descended first, and had come to the end of the line many yards from the ground. It had slipped through his hands and he had fallen, breaking his back. His father had followed, and the rope had broken, where it had been badly spliced, hardly a couple of fathoms below the window.

At daylight, a further discovery was made, the body of Andros Aylmer being found floating face downward among the Guillemot Rock at almost precisely the spot whence, years before, he had himself lifted into his arms the little fair-haired, blue-eyed child who was afterward known as Ruth. Of the four fugitives, Martin Aylmer was the only one who escaped—by breasting the waves and swimming out to the waiting sloop. And of him nothing further was ever again heard.

It was on that same day that Sir George de Carteret returned in his ship from England, bringing with him an official order for the immediate execution of the five rebels named as traitors in the King's earlier warrant ; so that it was, after all, only by a few short hours that Andros Aylmer escaped a far less honourable death.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE FIGURE ON THE CAUSEWAY

No one was more anxious to hear Ruth's account of her adventure in the corridor on that night of storm than was young Lord Debenham, and it was not until after she had confided it to him in all its details that it became commonly known in the castle that in giving the alarm of the escape of the prisoners she had been once again of personal service to the Prince, in saving him from what they believed to be an attempt upon his life.

She invited Hubert into her own room, to let him see for himself the window through which the rope had been thrown, and, while listening to her, he sat on the top of the great oak chest from which she had taken the clothes provided for her by Perrotine.

"Sure thou art one of the luckiest persons alive to have had so many chances of winning the gratitude of His Royal Highness," he said, at the conclusion of her modestly spoken narrative. "First 'twas the adventure of the cave, then the encounter in the copse, and now again this affair in the corridor. Marry, I expect the Prince will be minded to reward thee with something better than a new wardrobe the next time we go over to England."

Ruth looked at him blankly.

"Ah, to be sure," he continued, seeing her perplexity. "I had forgotten that it had not yet been

sent ashore ; but 'twill come ere this evening, I promise you. And, my heart alive, shouldn't I delight to be present when its glories are all disclosed to you ! 'Tis too much for me even to rehearse the catalogue of all the silks and brocades, all the pretty shoes and gloves and feathers and what not ! I do assure you that it occupied us two full days of our sojourn in London, choosing and deciding upon them. All Lombard Street and Cheapside were ransacked. Yet with the help of my mother and the Admiral, I doubt not that the choice will be to your liking. And if naught else please you, I warrant me that the rope of pearls, added by the Admiral, will be enough to deprive you of breath."

"Mercy me !" cried Ruth in wonder. "What is the meaning of all this silly talk ? Surely you have not left the better part of your senses behind in England ! Your brocades and silks and ropes of pearls have nothing in the world to do with me. And I know no more about them than I know of the Admiral that you have so particularly referred to. I am acquainted with no admiral. So there's an end on't."

Hubert flung his arms about his head of brown curls and swayed to and fro with boyish laughter.

"What ? " he exclaimed, forcing himself to gravity. "Is't possible we have been ashore all these hours, and yet that you have not learned of Sir George de Carteret's promotions ? 'Tis like his modesty, I vow ! But to be serious—for I perceive that you are not in a merry mood—'tis true that Sir George has been appointed vice-Admiral of England, as well as His Majesty's Lieutenant-Governor of Jersey, which latter position he of course anticipated."

The news did not appear to gladden Ruth as he expected.

"'Twill take him away from Jersey," she regretted. "For an admiral is nothing unless he has a fleet to command and to fight against his country's enemies upon the high seas."

"As to that," returned Hubert, "we shall not for the present be sent on foreign service. Sir George's immediate commission is to act under Prince Rupert in maintaining England's authority in the Narrow Seas, over which we still claim the sovereignty. His work will be to pursue, seize, scatter, fight with or destroy all ships which fail to recognise that same sovereignty, and woe betide the craft, of whatever realm, that refuseth to lower her topsails to a King's ship in submissive salute!"

"And, prithee, does his commission include the destruction of the Parliament ships, which are manned by our own countrymen?" Ruth questioned anxiously.

"Ay, truly. And wherefore not?" answered Hubert. "Has not Prince Rupert been doing so for months past? Sir George de Carteret will do the same, only with better seamanship and, I trust, greater success."

Ruth nodded and was silent for a while, her eyes were fixed curiously upon the boy's face, in which she was trying to find some resemblance to his mother's.

"'Tis to be hoped that His Majesty will provide his new admiral with a goodly squadron of ships," she said presently.

"Ah, there you have touched the weak spot of the whole business," cried young Lord Debenham. "For while the King's navy is steadily diminishing, that of the Parliament becomes daily stronger. In point of fact, Sir George is expected to provide his own ships, and fit them out at his own private expense. The King has no money of his own, and, it seems, is trusting

to his admirals to provide for the paying of his debts out of the proceeds of their captures ; even as Drake and Hawkins provided for Queen Elizabeth. And what man, having the wherewithal, would refuse, I'd like to know ? ”

“ Not Sir George de Carteret, for one,” declared Ruth. “ And, after all, to spend his wealth upon the building of ships for the defence of his King and country were vastly wiser than wasting it upon the buying of ropes of pearls, which I am sure Sir George would never do. And, for my own part, I know not what a rope of pearls may mean, or what may be its use withal.”

“ Thou’lt know very soon,” smiled Hubert, rising and moving to the door. “ But I may warn you beforehand that ’tis somewhat less long than a ship’s cable.”

His promise that she would know very soon was duly fulfilled when on the evening of that same day a large chest of carven oak was deposited in her room, and left with the lid flung open, displaying the pearl necklace lying upon a cushion of azure silk. Its beauty did indeed deprive her of breath as she gazed upon it without daring to touch it. What other finery the chest contained was only partly revealed to her ; for so little did she believe that it was intended for herself that she refrained from examining it below the topmost layer, much less from presuming to apply any of it to her own adornment. She had only Hubert’s playful word for it that the chest and its precious contents were a gift from the Prince, and, as the Prince himself never referred to the matter, she was not emboldened to question him. And so, for several days, the treasures were allowed to remain unexplored and neglected. And in the meantime there came disturbing news from Plymouth which



occupied the Prince to the exclusion of all such minor considerations as those of a bashful maid and a mysterious box of clothes.

The Civil War in England had arrived at a critical stage. Oliver Cromwell was rising to yet greater power in the land, with his New Model army and his Parliament, and now it was reported that King Charles himself had been deprived of his personal liberty and was a captive in Carisbrooke Castle, in the Isle of Wight.

On learning this grave news, the Prince of Wales at once determined to take his departure from Mont Orgueil and from the Channel Islands, in the hope of assisting in his father's release. And accordingly he embarked as soon as *The Eagle* could be got ready. Thus abruptly were the courtly entertainments at the castle abandoned ; thus abruptly did the sojourn of "Cornet Jack Merry" come to an end !

His efforts, of whatever nature they may have been, were, as you well know, futile. The imprisonment of King Charles at Carisbrooke was but the prelude to his trial, to his death on the scaffold at Whitehall, and to the institution of the Protectorate.

Even after the death of Charles the First, Sir George de Carteret refused to yield to the new order of Government. On his own authority as Governor of Jersey he caused the Prince of Wales to be publicly proclaimed as King Charles the Second in the marketplace of St. Helier's ; and he still held Jersey for the King. It was largely owing to his strenuous loyalty to the House of Stuart that the Channel Islands continued Royalist while all the rest of the British Isles had gone over to the side of Cromwell and the Roundheads. For nearly two years after the institution of the Commonwealth, Jersey and Guernsey

remained in isolation and became the final fortress of the Cavaliers.

A few months after the execution of Charles the First, the young King—less a king than a state-prisoner—returned to the friendly refuge of Mont Orgueil Castle, accompanied this time by his younger brother James, the Duke of York. And Perrotine de Carteret and Ruth Aylmer were thus enabled to renew their acquaintance with him whom they had known as Jack Merry.

But Sir George de Carteret could not thus entertain the two princes and continue openly to defy the rule of Oliver Cromwell without making himself an object of serious concern to the Parliament. He was becoming too formidable and dangerous an enemy to the Commonwealth to be wholly ignored. He had turned his island into a hotbed of intrigue, and so numerous were the aristocratic exiles in Jersey that it was said that you could meet a lord in every lane and a countess in every cottage. If de Carteret was mischievous on land, however, he was even masterly on sea. He was the most capable seaman of his time—far more so than his contemporary, Admiral Blake, who never trod a ship's quarterdeck until he was fifty—and his boyish experiences among the Barbary corsairs had given him an unparalleled training in piracy. His daring captures of Dutch treasure ships were readily condoned ; but the Jersey pirates, of whom he was the instigator and leader, had already become the terror of the neighbouring seas, and he was adding to his own fleet not only the prizes taken from foreigners but also those taken with equal boldness from Cromwell's newly constituted navy of England.

As his piracies increased, so also did increase the Parliament's desire to make a speedy end of him ;

and at length an expedition was despatched from the Thames against the Channel Islands in general and against Sir George de Carteret in particular. The famous Admiral Blake was in command of the squadron, and Colonel Haynes led the troops.

They had no easy task before them. De Carteret had four thousand trained men in Jersey, and his forts were capable of defence, whilst to attempt to land troops on a rocky coast in stormy weather was always a risky operation. Sir George had early news of the coming of the enemy, and, whilst counting upon his strength to repel the invaders, he prepared himself for possible defeat by hiding his treasures on the island of Sark, and by sending Lady de Carteret, Perrotine and all his aristocratic friends across to France. He would have sent Ruth Aylmer also, and instructed Lancelot that he intended her to go. But when the moment for their embarkation arrived Ruth was nowhere to be found, and an excited search failed to discover her. Lancelot was too busy in preparing for the defence of Mont Orgueil to concern himself with the whereabouts of the missing girl, and he did not prolong the search after the ship had sailed.

Sir George was not told that she had not gone, and when, some few days later, Blake's squadron appeared on the coast, he was content to believe that Ruth was safe in France with his mother and sister.

The ships drew as near as they could, but the weather was too boisterous to allow of any attempt at landing for many days, and when the storm abated the horses of the expedition were weakened by starvation and rough usage. Nevertheless, they were landed in the darkness of an October night and at daylight were met by the defending forces. After half an hour of sharp struggle the Royalist horse broke and

fled. De Carteret's cavaliers had been well drilled, but they were no match for Cromwell's better disciplined Roundheads, and their defeat convinced Sir George of his inability to keep the open field. He therefore left his brother Lancelot in command at Mont Orgueil and himself retired into the security of Elizabeth Castle.

Mont Orgueil and the minor forts fell rapidly, surrendered to Colonel Haynes, and Blake took up his position outside St. Aubyn's Bay to block the Governor in his fortress and starve him into submission. The surrender could not be long delayed, for the castle was quite cut off, and the garrison was large. A bombardment was opened and replied to, and an intermittent duel between the fortress and the fleet was continued throughout the whole of the month of November and well into December. Sir George was prepared to hold on until the end of the year if need were ; and would have done so but that the cosmopolitan rabble within his gates began to show signs of mutiny. This and another circumstance caused him to yield sooner than he intended.

. . .

It was the fiftieth morning of the siege. There was a nip of frost in the clear, bright, winter air, and the soldiers of the garrison had not yet all discarded their capes. In the offing, Blake's flagship had altered her moorings so that her guns might be trained obliquely upon an embrasure from which the Governor's heaviest piece of artillery had been teasing him for some days past. The batteries on the Town Hill had opened their fire upon the landward walls of the obstinate fortress. George de Carteret was quietly watching the effect of each successive shot upon the solid masonry. He stood in the midst of a group of

cavaliers, all older than himself, excepting Lord Debenham, who was at his side, looking none the better for his six weeks' confinement within the castle on siege rations.

All of them had ceased to pay particular regard to their dress. De Carteret's jack boots were thick with dust, as were his trunks ; his morion was clogged with verdigris and his corselet was dull and bore the marks of many bullets. His face had taken on a hard, set look, with deep lines about the mouth and dark circles about the eyes. He was giving his orders very deliberately. There was no excitement ; the only display of feeling was a grim smile when occasionally a shot dislodged a few splinters of stone, fell ridiculously wide or successfully defaced some familiar object on the battlements ; or a chuckle when a return shot buried itself in a ship's stout timbers, or sent up a cloud of dust under the muzzle of a cannon on the heights.

Nick Coppinger and Silas Cruse were at the gun by which the Governor stood. They had charged it and were hesitating before levelling it at random upon the hill battery.

"Nay, waste not your ammunition by firing needlessly at too distant an object," Sir George languidly advised. "You want to do more than make a noise to startle the seabirds. Aim at the third piece with which the gunner with the white clout about his poll is so persistently trying to batter in our gates. Or give me a try."

He stepped himself to the rear of the heavy gun and, having lowered its elevation to the desired level, was bidding Silas apply his lighted linstock to the priming when an excited voice behind him cried aloud :

"Stop ! Fire it not !"



De Carteret flung the fuse aside and turned round sharply.

"What is it, then, Hubert?" he questioned, "Are you afraid that I shall hurt some one?"

"Ay, surely," returned Hubert, clutching at his arm and pointing along the causeway left bare by the retreating tide. "Look!" he cried. "Dost not see the cloaked figure yonder approaching among the rocks, carrying a white banner? 'Tis a woman, and your aim is full upon her if she hide not. There again! Ay, 'tis a woman for sure."

The figure stood conspicuous now upon a rugged boulder, holding her banner aloft. The guns on both sides were silenced, their lingering smoke rose thinly into the higher air and drifted out to sea. George de Carteret leaned forward at the parapet, peeping out searchingly across the rocks. Encouraged by the cessation of firing, the stranger was coming more quickly, leaping nimbly from stone to stone.

"'Tis a maid, Zir George, a-bringing 'e zum message," announced Coppinger.

"Go, Isaac," Sir George called to Wincall. "Throw open the gates and bid her enter."

He drew back and the men about him saw that his face had turned ashen grey and that his hands for once were trembling. Yet again he glanced nervously at the quickly approaching figure.

"No, no!" he shouted, agitatedly. "Wincall, come back. I alone will let her in. Stand from me!"

Hubert followed him to the gate, and together, with Wincall's necessary help, they shot back the heavy bolts and drew aside the ponderous stubborn bars, and the portals which had withstood the assaults of an invading army were swung open to admit a blue-eyed, fair-haired girl.

De Carteret stood in the opening, nervously tightening his belt, pulling off his gauntlets, and staring intently at the advancing figure the while he muttered in a dry, hoarse voice :

“ It is she ! It is she ! Oh, great heaven, where hath she been ? ”

As she came nearer, tripping lightly in her dainty, silver buckled shoes over the rough stones, she threw back her hood and unfastened her cloak, looping it over her arm. The sunlight shone upon her golden hair, upon her beautiful face and upon the triple chain of pearls that encircled her full white throat. She dropped her cloak and banner and came to him open handed, flinging herself into his arms like a frightened bird that had reached its long-sought home.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### WITHIN THE GATES

"RUTH—my Ruth!" he murmured brokenly, clasping her to him. "Where hast thou been? How camest thou here?"

Her hands were upon his shoulders. She drew herself from him at arms' length, looking upward into his haggard face, which bore all the traces of his endurance.

"At last you have thrown open the gates to me," she said. "For three long weeks have I hungered to come to you, waiting, waiting for the surrender which I knew must come. Wherefore have you delayed?"

She looked beyond him through the wide arched gateway to where the red-crossed flag of St. George waved proudly in the breeze. Then a shudder thrilled through her as a shot from one of the ships hurtled overhead and fell with a dull crash against the castle rock. She steadied herself, clinging to him.

"Will you not haul down the flag?" she implored, observing the lines of care that had come about his bloodshot eyes.

He frowned, and his pale lips twitched uneasily.

"Why should I?" he asked, surprised at her bold request. "We have not yet come to our last

keg of powder or our last bag of biscuits. Why should I lower my colours?"

"For the sake of your starving garrison," she answered him firmly. "For the sake of your enemies, who are our countrymen; for England's sake—and for your own."

He shook his head, regarding her sadly, while he entwined his hard fingers in her soft, white ones.

"And admit myself defeated?" he protested; "defeated by a mob of rebels?"

"Why not admit what is too patently the truth?" she pursued.

"Never!" he declared desperately, slowly withdrawing his hands.

"Ah," she regretted with a sigh, "I might have known. I might have known. But if you are indeed so resolute to sacrifice more precious lives—if you are determined still to hold out unto the very end and unto the very death—then be it so. You know best; and I will share your fate, deeming it my highest honour to die by your side. And the sooner the better."

He shrank from her with a look of pain. Did she mean that she, so young, so full of rich vitality, so beautiful, was willing to give up her life for him and to share the death which had so grimly confronted him from day to day? He glanced back into her eloquent, violet-blue eyes. How bright, how clear and steadfast they were! Never in all her life had she seemed to him so beautiful or so precious as at this moment.

"We can but die together," she reiterated, moving into the shadows within the gates.

The firing from the battery had been resumed, and, as she spoke those words of calm resignation, a cannon-ball struck the very spot upon which she had stood

and sent up a cloud of dust and gravel and broken stone.

Sir George flung his arm protectingly round her shoulders and drew her with him into the shelter of the thick walls. And there, while the portals were being closed and the bolts shot home, he stood irresolute, battling with himself. He called Lord Debenham to his side.

"Hubert," he said hollowly, "quick, ere I change my mind. Bid them sound me the trumpet to cease firing, while I lay aloft to the tower to haul down our flag!" And, turning to Ruth, he added sorrowfully: "Not for my own sake, but for yours, will I yield. And whilst you are with me not another shot shall be fired."

"Then shall I be with you always," she rejoined, keeping pace with him as he strode athwart the battlements. She noticed that his footsteps faltered as he walked, and she realised that it was now he who was weak and needed help, and she who was strong.

"Did you not go with the others across to France?" he questioned her, pausing at the entrance of the great hall.

A flush of rosy colour mounted to her dimpled cheeks, spreading to her waxen forehead and her small, shell-like ears. She glanced downward, and, as her eyes rested upon his torn and grimy boots, she shook her head.

"No," she answered. "You once enjoined me never to leave the neighbourhood unless you should take me. And I obeyed, until I thought full surely that you had forgotten me."

"That have I never done," he breathed in response, slowly unbuckling his sword-belt. "I have thought of you all along, and unceasingly prayed to God to preserve you from harm. But you have not



been dwelling in Mont Orgueil? Where have you been?"

"At the farmstead of Beau Desert. Thither I went, because I learned that the widow Lilette Aylmer was ill. For many days I nursed her. I nursed her until she died, blessing me with her last breath. And when she was laid to her rest in a corner of Gorey churchyard, three weeks ago, I tried each day to come to you here, knowing that you were in sore need. I came each morning and evening, even as I came to-day, despite the risk of being struck by a cannon ball. But always the gates were closed against me, and I might not enter. My signals were ignored."

"Alas! And I never knew!" he moaned.

She laid her fingers upon his arm. The bugle was sounding.

"Go, I pray you," she urged. "Let the flag be lowered. And believe that 'tis no disgrace to lower it to brave Englishmen."

She turned into the hall. Hubert followed her, bringing her cloak. He laid it, neatly folded, upon the bare table, and stood in front of her, his thumbs thrust into his belt. After his experience of the siege, it was a welcome relief to look once again upon something that was not sordid and grimly ugly. Her presence was like the opening of a pure, unsullied lily in a darksome, flowerless waste.

"'Tis sweet to see you here, Mademoiselle," he said with boyish bashfulness. "And I vow you have achieved that which the Lord General Cromwell himself and all his dauntless Ironsides could never have accomplished. Sir George would have seen us all die one by one like flies rather than give in to any but you. But you—you could even lead him with a single thread of that golden hair of yours!" He

paused, abashed at his own boldness, yet conscious of the spell which her presence had cast upon him. "Would that I had a sister such as you!" he wistfully sighed. "Then should I know how to pay proper homage to a girl."

"Has your lordship neither sister nor brother, then?" Ruth asked him, straightening her little velvet and lace cap.

"Not I," he answered, walking restlessly to and fro in front of her, "though I once had both. They were older than I, and I remember neither, for they both were taken on the same day when I was no more than a puling infant withal. 'Twas no fell disease or calenture that took them. Sidney, my brother, was cruelly slain by a rascally Turkoman's scimitar while bravely defending sister Marjorie against a band of roving Turks, who captured her and carried her off in their galley to far off Barbary."

He paused as the door opened and Isaac Wincall entered with an armful of musty wood for the fire.

"Surely I have heard the tale before," Ruth nodded, "but continue."

"'Twas at my grandsire Sir Percival Vine's estate on the Devon coast that it befell," Hubert proceeded. "Mother—thou hast met my mother, the Countess?—Mother and the three of us, with our nurse, were there in the summer time, recovering from the measles, or some such childish complaint; and we were at play upon the beach, Sidney and Marjorie building a fortress of sand, when the Moors fell upon us. 'Twas the nurse that they wanted, but she escaped with me in her arms, and, as I have said, Sidney was slain and Marjorie stolen away, to be sold into slavery, 'tis believed. Tut, tut, Isaac, thou'rt making a great noise there!" he cried reprovingly to Wincall.

Isaac had dropped his armful of logs on the hearth, and while still stooping had turned his head to look askance at the two young people whom he had disturbed.

"Zir Percival Vine?" he muttered. "Did your lordship zay that your lordship's grandsire was Zir Percival Vine, of Clovelly? Send I may live!"

"Ay, surely," smiled Hubert. "Wherefore do you ask?"

"I knowed he of old, my lord, and all his family," said Isaac, standing upright with a block of the sea timber in his gnarled hand, "includin' your lordship's mother, when her was a slip of a maid no older'n your lordship's self, and years ere her'd a thought o' marryin'! But little did I wot that 'twas child o' hers that were brought cryin' aboard the galley that arternoon!"

"Eh?" Hubert looked at him in eager inquiry. "*Brought*, say you? Explain. Were you, also, on board?"

Isaac tottered toward him, still with the log in his hand.

"In sooth I was," he stammered, "for I doubt not that it was the zame occasion."

Ruth glanced from one to the other of them in bewilderment. She remembered George de Carteret telling her this story of the theft of a child by Barbary corsairs, but he had omitted to inform her that the baby saved by the nurse was his own cabin page, Lord Debenham. What did Isaac Wincall know of the unhappy infant that had been snatched from its home?

"Ay, for sure," Isaac proceeded. "I warrant it can be but the zame. You see, my lord, 'twas this ways. I'd been for many a woeful year a slave in the hands of the Turks, as you may know by the

token of the loss of mine ears, which they sliced off from my cheeks and hung up for to adorn their casbah gates withal in their city of Alger. And they put I to labour at the oars, chained to the rowing bench with many another poor Christian captive. On a time they adventured in that galley upon a long voyage into the outer seas beyond the Pillars of Hercules, purposing to bring more Christians to their markets. 'Twas a profitable commerce. To the shores of Biscay Bay they went, now under sail, now rowing, and yet farther northward to Ireland, where they took many captives, both women and men, ere they crossed to the dear coasts of mine own Devon, where I'd been happy in days gone by. And there, nigh unto Clovelly, befell the thing which your lordship hath specified."

"Marry, but thou'st never said aught of this before!" cried Hubert excitedly.

"Nay, but were I to recount all the horrors I've witnessed 'twould fill a whole book," explained Isaac. "And since I knew not that your lordship had relations with Devon, wherefore should I have particularised that especial adventure withal?"

"Oh, on with your story, for pity's sake!" urged Hubert, unable to control his impatience. "What of my sister?"

"Nay, ask me not," returned the old man, turning to go back to the fire, "for 'tis little, and less than little, that I know. Chained to my bench, and withouten power or spirit to look on, I but heard the child screaming for its mammy, knowing not whether 'twas boy or maid, or whether 'twas offspring of lord or labourer."

"But what of her fate?" cried Hubert. "Didst see her in Algiers—sold, mayhap, like a posy in the market-place?"

Isaac dropped his log upon the fire and crushed it down with his foot.

"Methinks a child so young would have served but as a makeweight to a more covetable purchase," he opined, coming forward again. "I saw her not throughout the voyage. And yet, though I saw her not, I well remember how they cast her overboard into the sea, haply to meet a goodlier fate. 'Twas on a darksome, stormy night, my lord. The Moors had been shaping for the coasts of Brittany, but in mid-channel we were espied by an English ship of war—a frigate—which gave chase. And you may warrant our oars became vastly heavy in our hope to be captured. But your lateen-sailed galleys of Barbary be wondrous quick footed. Yet, as we neared a dark and rocky coast on our lee and the frigate was like to overhaul us, many of the women captives essayed to escape, trusting to be picked up. Ere they were discovered and their good purpose arrested, they bound the child upon a grating and launched it o'er the side. Thereafter, us saw no more of the frigate, but only heard a great cry in the night, far in our wake."

Ruth Aylmer flung up her hands, and a cry escaped her.

"Ah, I see light!" she cried.

At that moment Sir George de Carteret entered, divested of his body armour, with his hair combed and his face cleansed of its grime, and carrying in his arms the white and red flag which he had hauled down as a signal of his surrender.

Neither Ruth nor Hubert observed him standing in amazement on the threshold. They were staring at each other fixedly, she with an eager, searching scrutiny in her eyes, he with an expression of deep sadness.



"Enough." Hubert nodded. "We now know the worst. My little sister was drowned."

"No, no!" cried Ruth. She had grown pale; she was breathing agitatedly, the pearls on her neck rising and falling with the heaving of her bosom. She was gripping the edge of the table with her two hands. "No," she went on. "Not so. The pursuing frigate ran upon the rocks. The rocks were the Guillemot Reef, here in Jersey. The frigate was *The Rainbow*—*The Rainbow* from which I was supposed to be a survivor. And the little child—your sister—was not drowned; but floated shoreward upon the grating, to be rescued by George de Carteret!"

A sigh that was like the moaning of the wind came from the doorway; but neither heard it.

Lord Debenham stood bewildered for some instants. Then, as in a flash, he understood what Ruth had more quickly divined, and with a glad cry he leapt to her and flung his arms about her.

"Ruth—Ruth—thou art my sister, after all!" he cried. "My long lost sister—the dearest, sweetest sister in all the wide world!"

Sir George de Carteret staggered forward, confused yet vaguely understanding. Hubert saw him now, but did not heed his presence.

"Sister!" he repeated, as if now for the first time in his life he comprehended the true meaning of the word. "Sister Marjorie," he implored, holding her from him with his hands clasped behind her neck, his eyes feasting themselves upon hers that were now filling with tears. "Wilt thou kiss me, dear?"

"My brother!" cried Ruth. And she kissed him many times and again, nor seemed willing to cease until suddenly she caught sight of George de Carteret, when she drew apart.

Hubert took her hand and led her up to the Governor.

"Permit me, Sir George," he said, "to introduce you to my dear sister—the Lady Marjorie Debenham."

Very quickly he explained all that de Carteret had not already guessed from what he had seen and overheard.

"Yes, yes, 'tis clear as daylight now," Sir George nodded. "Now that we know that the grating came from the corsair and not from the frigate which was chasing, the whole strange mystery is a mystery no longer. The only mystery to me, indeed, is how any commander in his senses could pursue a lighter craft so close inshore as to run his own ship aground." He turned to Isaac Wincall, who was following Hubert out of the room. "Art certain sure, Isaac, that there was but one infant aboard the corsair galley?" he asked.

"No, sir, I be not sure," he answered doubtingly.

"'Tis not important," interposed Ruth, addressing Sir George, "for I may tell you now, that Lilette Aylmer, ere she died, gave unto me the clothing which I wore when I was carried to the farm, and that upon my pinafore there is the sign of a coronet."

"Then is your identity fully established," decided Sir George, "and you have my most sincere congratulations."

"You are not pleased?" said Ruth, conscious that his voice had in it a tone of restraint.

The flag which he had held in his arms now fell in folds upon the floor.

"For thee, Lady Marjorie, I am well pleased," he responded sadly. "For thou art now a great lady, with vast wealth, as well as beauty. But for myself"—he shrugged his shoulders and moved the flag aside with his foot—"for myself in this moment of my

abject downfall and defeat how can I be glad? In an instant thou hast been snatched far beyond my reach, and I could almost wish that thou wert still the modest maid who led Priscilla to the pastures."

She caught her breath. The tears started to her eyes.

"Oh, but I am still your Ruth," she pleaded, going up to him and laying her hands in supplication upon the front of his war-worn doublet. "Am I not still the same as the helpless waif, the nameless foundling whom you did rescue from the deep? Am I not the same as when you said to me upon the ship that you would willingly voyage with me to the world's end? Am I altered from the poor suffering wanderer whom you fought for in the desperate duel by the cave, and carried in your arms away from her tribulations? Nay, I am still thine—thine and thine only; for without thee the world for me were empty."

"Mine?" he murmured softly, tenderly, regarding her almost with timidity.

"Thine as always," she answered him. "As from the beginning. For I love thee now, as then, with all my heart and soul. And if thou wilt, then will I not take this new-found position, nor change my name from the one that thou hast known."

"Faith, thou shalt change it if I have my will," he responded with a smile, enclosing her hands within his own and drawing them fondly about his neck. "Thou shalt change it in good time, my sweetheart. And it shall be the Lady Marjorie de Carteret, if thou'lt have it so. And we'll voyage together in consort, never again to part."

. . . . .

It was while he was still embracing her that the door was flung open and Admiral Blake was announced.

A soldierly, middle aged man, he was, and he advanced into the hall with hand outstretched as in friendship.

"I am honoured to meet you, Sir George," he began politely, "and I admire the completeness of your submission no less than the gallantry of your long and heroic defence. I can only regret the circumstances which caused me to leave some sorry marks upon your castle walls ; but I trust that the damage may be readily repaired."

De Carteret bowed to him and confronted him with proud dignity, declining as yet to take his hand.

"What are your terms?" he demanded. "For, although I have lowered my flag, it does not follow that I surrender unconditionally."

"I think that you will not deem the terms unduly harsh," returned Blake. "England, Sir George, can ill afford to lose the services of so capable a seaman as you have ever proved yourself to be, and I am empowered by the Lord General to invite you to transfer your interests to the Commonwealth. You will retain your present posts and privileges, your castles and your estates ; the one condition being that henceforth you withdraw your enmity and place your services and your fleet entirely at the disposal of the Council of State, receiving your admiral's share of prize money. Accept these terms and I will immediately withdraw my ships and our soldiers, leaving you in peace. Refuse them and—take the less desirable alternative."

De Carteret stooped and picked up the fallen flag. Ruth helped him to fold it away.

"The occasion may yet come when we may fly it once more," he said, handing it over to her. "I beg your ladyship to preserve it until the glad day when the King returns to his own again."

Then he turned to Admiral Blake and held forth his hand.

“And now, sir,” he said, “believe that though I have held out so long for a cause that is hopeless, yet I am still for England, whatever befall.”

The two men shook hands, and there was the beginning of a comradeship in arms which continued through many a hard fought fight in maintaining England’s sovereignty of the seas.

Needless is it to add that Ruth kept the flag. And long years afterward, when Charles the Second was restored to his throne, it was she who unfurled it to the breeze from the tower of the castle of which she was the happy mistress, joining with her husband in the prayer so dear to them both, “*God save the King.*”

THE END













